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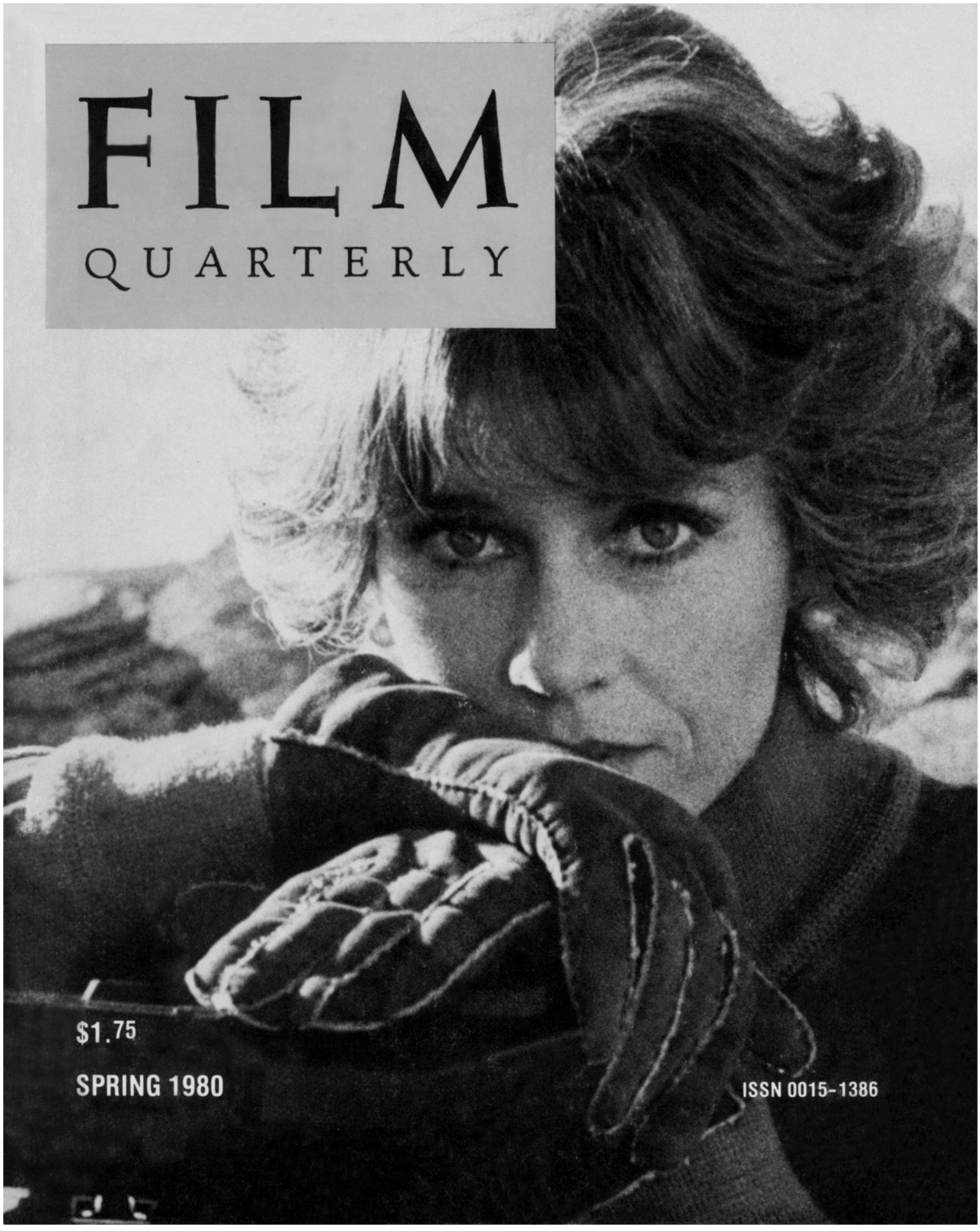

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EDITED BY
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bomber crew has an unearthliness which foreshadows *Orphée:* the entry is by a stairway past a large curved mirror; the exit, by rowboat gliding silently along a subterranean channel. In other films the two modes are evenly matched from the start, and the viewer may not always be sure which is which. This applies to *A Matter of Life and Death,* which Powell still considers his most satisfying film:[1] the afterlife scenes may be viewed throughout as the delusion of injured Peter (David Niven); but when the doctor (Roger Livesey), killed in an accident, reappears at once on the other side and continues his efforts to help Peter, he carries a charge of reality over with him.

In *Peeping Tom* the two modes of perception are more than evenly matched: they remain inseparable throughout. On the one hand, the characters and settings look and sound as naturalistic as in any ordinary commercial film: where an artificial eyelid closed over the lens in *A Matter of Life and Death,* it is a real eye that opens at the start of *Tom;* where Sammy in *The Small Back Room* had delusions of a gigantic whisky bottle, Helen's alcoholic mother grapples with one of normal size; where the "Red Shoes" ballet used optical trickery to convert a flower into a knife, Mark's tripod becomes lethal with the simple removal of a sheath. On the other hand, the straightforward images and sounds of *Peeping Tom* reverberate with multiple circuits of metaphor, all of which connect with the master metaphor, film = life. Powell distilled his more than 30 years of film life into *Peeping Tom:* the madness of Sister Ruth from *Black Narcissus;* the ruthlessness of Lermontov from *The Red Shoes;* Sammy's fear as he tackles the unexploded booby trap from *The Small Back Room;* Wynne-Candy's romantic obsession with different incarnations of the same woman from *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp;* Joan Webster's struggle against her destiny from *I Know Where I'm Going;* and, for good measure, the unseen camera that recorded them all.

Perhaps the most startling element in *Peeping Tom* is not the sadism, or the reflexive role of film-making, or even the circuitry of metaphor, but the unwavering assurance with which it unfolds. If the cinema has a masterpiece of innocence in *Citizen Kane,* then *Peeping Tom* stands beside it as a masterpiece of filmic experience.

NOTES

1. From written answers to a questionnaire, September 1979.
2. *Films and Filming,* May 1960.
3. From statements made at a New York Film Festival press conference, October 1979.

CREDITS: Direction: Michael Powell. Script: Leo Marks. Photography: Otto Heller. Music: Brian Easdale. Distribution: Corinth Films.

NEW PERIODICALS, continued

Discourse ($9.00 per year or 3 issues, from Box 4667, Berkeley, CA 94704) is a new journal for theoretical studies in media and culture. The first issue contains a long interview with Christian Metz, an article by Bertrand Augst following up the cinematic implications of Foucault's ideas on the order of discourse, an article on Habermas and Marx by Paul Thomas, and an interview with Laura Mulvey. (Four of the editors of *Discourse* have disassociated themselves from the magazine and founded a new journal: *First Discourse,* Box 1236, 2000 Center Street, Berkeley, CA 94704.)

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Peeping Tom: A SECOND LOOK

WILLIAM JOHNSON

If I were forced, at the point of a sharpened tripod leg, to name the ten best films I have ever seen, that list would include *Peeping Tom.*

Since the film recently swung back into critical favor after many years in the wilderness, my judgment may seem hasty, a belated gesture of protest at the savagery of the British critics who, in 1960, made Powell unbankable.* On the contrary. Alerted by a friend in London who contributed to the British Film Institute's *Monthly Film Bulletin* (which replaced his favorable notice of *Tom* with a pan), I caught the film's 1962 New York "première" —at the bottom of a double bill in downtown Brooklyn—and was prepared only to call it the best horror film I had ever seen. By the end of the sixties, after several more viewings, the rating began to seem inadequate. But I did not raise it until my next viewing of *Tom*—in its original, untrimmed version at the 1979 New York Film Festival.†

Ironically, my reasons for admiring the film include the one for which it was most vilified. *Peeping Tom* presents a young cameraman who feels compelled to kill women and film their death agonies, and the 1960 critics were outraged at Powell's choice and handling of this Sadian theme.

Having become inured in the past two decades to seeing explicit sex and violence on the screen, viewers today are less likely to bridle at *Tom*'s subject matter. But Powell's sex and violence are explicit in a startling way—in fact, quite unlike the common implications of the term, since he achieves it without showing naked bodies, passionate embraces, dismemberment or ripped flesh. The only time we see a moment of death—at the end, when Mark Lewis impales himself—the modest amount of blood revealed would raise no protests on TV's family viewing hour.* There is nothing coy or devious about this restraint. The title announces the sexual motive in Mark's behavior, and his first victim is a prostitute. From then on, when Mark raises one leg of his tripod and unsheathes the hidden blade, the viewer can hardly overlook its resemblance to a penis. Similarly, when innocent Helen gives Mark a chaste kiss, and he then places his lips on the lens of his Filmo, it's hard not to see the gesture as a kind of perverse fellatio. Scenes like these have a more disturbing power than pornography because they implicate the viewer, obliging him or her to complete the sexual metaphor.

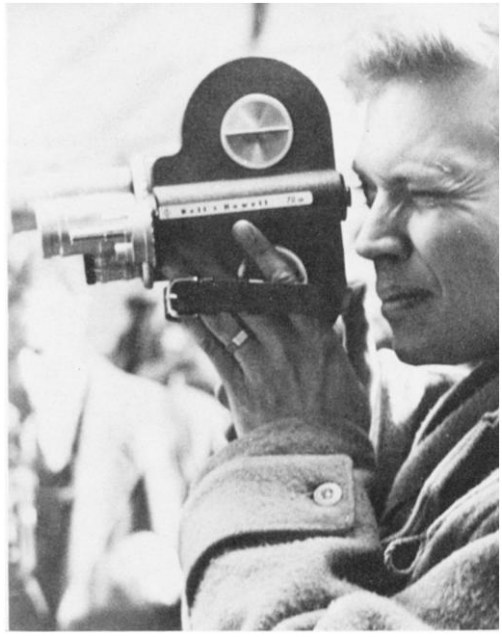
This sense of complicity is strengthened in various ways. Mark, played superbly by Carl Boehm, is personable, gentle and shy; he can also be cool and decisive, especially when carrying out his compulsion to film-and-kill. In other words, he bears a strong resemblance to the familiar type of movie hero who appears at first as an easygoing *naif* but reveals toughness under pressure—like James Stewart as the socially acceptable voyeur in *Rear Window.* In an early scene, when Mark goes to the candy store where he takes "girlie" pictures for sale under the counter, a respectable-looking customer makes a devious approach toward asking for some. As Mark stands by, half-smiling, the viewer is tempted to compare him favorably with the blustering hypocrite.

Today, the sympathy that Powell builds up for

*A few critics, such as Jean-Paul Török in France and, later, Raymond Durgnat in England—did sound a more positive note. But they could not undo the damage caused by the reviewers in the big dailies and weeklies.

†The film's critical reception even today falls short of general acclaim. Thus Vincent Canby of *The New York Times* managed to dismiss it as "one of the limper suspense movies you've ever seen" and "an excruciatingly schematic, very solemn melodrama, quite badly acted by everyone."

*Short of outright suppression, the film is practically uncensorable. Although the original American release print was trimmed, this must have been for length only: the missing scenes are mostly incidental and innocuous.



Discovery and removal of the body of Mark's first victim (left) as filmed by Mark; at right, Mark with his omnipresent Bell & Howell camera.

Mark may raise the additional objection that the film is sexist. After all, the victims are women and they go to their deaths passively. In view of the sexual nature of the killings, however, the victims could have been male only if Mark were made homosexual or female—alternatives which would raise equally strong objections. A sex killing cannot be expected to fit any socially acceptable paradigm, and sympathy should not be mistaken for approval. As for the victims' failure to resist, they are meant to be frightened to the point of paralysis by another of Mark's camera accessories (which I will discuss later). In any case, the two most important women in the film—Mark's tenant Helen (Anna Massey) and her blind mother (Maxine Audley)—play active roles, and each takes the initiative in entering Mark's life.

The question remains whether a female viewer can feel complicity with Mark.* However, this response does not depend only on sexual imagery and on Mark's character. For viewers of either sex who have any special interest in films, or who merely find themselves watching this one with fascination, Leo Marks and Powell have added another and more powerful stimulus—the bond between their hero's sadistic scopophilia and the whole domain of photography and film-making. Mark works at a commercial studio by day as focus-puller on a 35mm Mitchell, moonlights on his girlie pictures with an 8 x 10 view camera, and uses a specially equipped 16mm Bell and Howell Filmo for his personal project—which is not just a series of disconnected murder scenes but a documentary that includes the removal or discovery of the bodies and the police investigation—and culminates in Mark's suicide. As films-within-the-film we see not only Mark's work in progress and rushes from the commercial studio movie but also a mixture of scientific footage and home movies taken by his psychologist father, who used Mark as a guinea pig in studies of fear. From the pre-credits murder sequence, shown through a viewfinder mask, to the final shot of film running out of a projector, there are few scenes which lack either a photographic setting (a studio, Mark's darkroom) or the presence of the Filmo. In fact there is only one sequence where Mark leaves home without that Filmo—at Helen's insistence, when they go out to dinner. And even then, as they pass a couple

*The brevity of the film's post-Festival release in New York thwarted my attempts to canvass women filmgoers on this point. My wife, who does not share my high estimate of *Tom*, says that she did indeed identify with Mark even during the killings. I'm also guided by my own response to certain female protagonists who harm or humiliate males, from Barbara Stanwyck in *The Lady Eve* to Jeanne Moreau in *The Bride Wore Black*.

necking, Mark stops and reaches for the camera which isn't there.

Caught off guard, a critic who takes pride in viewing films with detachment may react violently against being made the accomplice of a murderous voyeur. And no doubt the critics of 20 years ago *were* caught off guard. To them, Michael Powell was a respected or at least respectable name: true, he'd made some offbeat films in the past, and he'd often been accused of lapses of taste, but his two most recent releases had been straightforward World War II dramas (*The Battle of the River Plate* and *Ill Met by Moonlight*). The relentless, unapologetic sadism of *Peeping Tom* must have come as a shock.

Worse still for those critics, scriptwriter Leo Marks and Powell offered no moral life-preserver they could cling to. Despite its analogy between scopophilia and cinema, *Tom* never indulges in any breast-beating about the dangers of over-obsession with films. Recently, when I asked Powell whether he intended *Peeping Tom* to be in any way a comment on the film-making profession, he answered with a categorical No.[1] What's more, the film makes no claim to any redeeming social message. Professing to depict violence only in order to condemn it is one of the more common hypocrisies, not only among the makers of commercial films—such as *Scarface* (another New York Film Festival retrospective) and *Midnight Express*—but also among world-famous writers: when Victor Hugo's *The Last Day of a Condemned Man* ran into the same kind of critical storm as did *Peeping Tom*, he responded with a long, brilliant but implausible defense claiming that he had written the novel purely as an indictment of the death penalty. Neither in 1960 nor today has Powell suggested that *Tom* should be treated with respect because it assails the abuse of science, cruelty to children, or inadequate mental health services.* The virtues of the film elude any simple catch phrases.

* Powell's unconcern with self-justification extends to a minor element of the film that has upset some of today's critics: the Austrian accent that tinges Carl Boehm's excellent English. Most film-makers would have thrown in a line explaining, say, that Mark had been sent to live with an aunt in Austria after his mother died; Powell does not. As it happens, the accent works well as an aural sign of Mark's strangeness.

Not only does *Peeping Tom* avoid taking any obvious moral stand, but it deploys all kinds of devices that make for commerical audience appeal. There is a considerable amount of humor, some of it incidental (such as the vignette of the hypocritical customer mentioned above), some of it spun directly from Mark's activities (as when the prop trunk which contains the body of one of his victims is used in a studio take). Above all, Powell borrows from and builds on the familiar strategies of horror and suspense films. A notable example is the killing of Viv (Moira Shearer), a studio stand-in who arranges to meet secretly with Mark after the day's wrap so that he can take some audition footage of her. Mark's previous killing, of course, has made it clear that he has other plans, so that when Viv hides in the dressing room to avoid a guard, the viewer knows she is unwittingly conspiring in her own death. As she enters the sound stage, the huge door rolls down behind her. She looks around but cannot see Mark. His Filmo whirs briefly on the sound track. Viv nervously starts whistling, and Mark joins in, stopping when she does. Lights come on, one by one, each accompanied by a piano discord. After Mark appears from hiding, there is a lengthy buildup to the climax: Viv practices dancing, wonders aloud what she should perform, plays with the Mitchell camera; Mark puts a chalk mark on the floor, prepares an impromptu set with the prop trunk placed against the chalk mark, frames Viv in his Filmo; and all of this is accompanied by the rapid, insistently percussive jazz of Wally Stott from the tape Viv plans to dance to. Then, complaining that she can't work up a serious mood, she asks, "What would frighten me to death?" Mark raises his camera: "Imagine someone coming toward you, who wants to kill you . . ."—and the climax finally arrives.

This kind of suspense—which may easily be branded as manipulative (as indeed any suspense may be)—informs not only individual sequences but the entire film. It derives not merely from the events but from their structure and tempo, so that it remains even at subsequent viewings when one knows what is going to happen. Powell's interest in music, overt in *The Red Shoes, Tales of Hoffmann, Oh Rosalinda!* and others, reveals itself in the tight construction of *Peeping Tom:* the entire

action centers on the making of Mark's documentary, and this consists of five movements whose tempi form a simple and elegant curve. There is a brief prelude (1), a slow, deliberate development (2), and then a general accelerando toward the climax (3–5):

1. Prostitute.

a. The killing. Continuous through-finder view; the camera jerks to one side when Mark presumably brings out a weapon, but no part of it can be seen.

b. The screening. Most of 1a is projected behind the credits, with Mark watching.

c. Followup filming. The body is carried out to an ambulance; some of the shots are through-finder. It is either this footage or 1a again that Mark is watching when Helen first knocks on his door.

2. Viv.

a. The killing. As described above, an extensive buildup for which 1a has prepared the viewer. Mark reveals the tripod leg blade. He refers to another frightening accessory, part of which can be glimpsed but not identified.

b. The screening. This is played to coincide with 3a (see below), thus varying and heightening the suspense.

c. Followup filming. More extensive and more suspenseful than 1c. During a runthrough of a studio movie scene, Mark dodges aside and films the opening of the trunk that contains Viv's body; later he films the police at the studio, and at one point is almost discovered as he hides in the sound stage lighting grid. One shot is through-finder—but this is the last in the film (the device has had its effect, and Powell doesn't overuse it).

3. Mrs. Stephens (Helen's blind mother).

a. The (abortive) killing. This includes 2b. Mark returns from dinner with Helen, enters his darkroom and starts to project the footage of Viv's death. Then he becomes aware of Mrs. Stephens' presence. (Sensing that he's mentally disturbed, she has come to ask him not to see Helen again until he's had psychiatric help.) Mark projects the killing of Viv onto both of them; disappointed that it doesn't show supreme terror, he starts to film Mrs. Stephens, raising the tripod leg, but stops. Nothing more is seen of the mysterious accessory. (Obviously there is no 3b or 3c; the pace is quickening.)

4. Milly (the girlie-picture model).

a. The killing. Just one brief shot of Mark standing over Milly with his camera: no exposed tripod

Mark has set up a "girlie photo" session with model Milly (Pamela Green) with the intention of killing her (which he does offscreen).

blade or accessory. (There is no 4b: Mark never has time to develop the film.)

c. Followup filming. With the quickening pace of events, this coincides with 5a (see below).

5. Mark himself.

a. The killing. In Mark's absence, Helen has entered the darkroom to leave him a note; she idly switches on the projector—and sees his documentary. (Powell doesn't repeat any footage for the viewer: he keeps his camera on Helen's reactions.) She starts to run out—straight into Mark. He knows the police are on his trail. He shows and tells Helen everything, including the tripod leg and the mysterious accessory—a mirror in which the victims see their own terror. As a siren approaches, Mark films the arrival of the police (this is 4c). Then he clips the camera and tripod to the wall and films his own death. (There is, of course, no 5b or 5c.)

To the British critics of 1960, jolted by the film's subject matter and the sense of complicity with Mark which it created, the commercial expertise of *Peeping Tom* must have seemed the last immoral straw. Of course, they shouldn't have been surprised. Powell had spent over 30 years in the commercial cinema, and his experiments (with color in *Black Narcissus*, sets and opticals in *Tales of Hoffman*, etc.) had been designed to extend its boundaries rather than leap outside. (When I asked whether he had found the restrictions of commercial film making a help as well as a hindrance, he answered: "I don't get the distinction. . . . I have always meant my films to be commercial."[1]) Nevertheless, some critics cited the commercial appeal of *Peeping Tom* as their chief reason for condemning it. Thus Peter G. Baker in *Films and Filming:* "[I]f we are going to have films about life's darker moments, then we must be very certain about the film-maker's motives. Whether he is genuinely trying to explain life . . . or whether he is concerned . . . merely to exploit life for what it is worth at the box-office. I cannot give Michael Powell the benefit of the doubt. His big giveaway is the emphasis not so much on the character of Mark, but on the detailed violent sexuality of the girls' deaths. And worse, in the cliché-ridden, ridiculous characterisation of the psychiatrist, played . . . and written for laughs."[2]

The irony of this is not that *Peeping Tom* started out as a box-office disaster but that, without its commercial appeal, it would have been an artistic failure, too, and no one would have rescued it from oblivion after 20 years. For it is precisely the humor, the suspense and the taut structure that hold the viewer in complicity with Mark. There's no trick to making villainy seem hateful or repellent; and little value in it, either. Consider Pasolini's Sadian film, *Salò*, which undercuts its ostensibly anti-fascist purpose by imputing fascism only to a handful of monsters: after all, how many of us viewers, given absolute power over other people, would choose to smack our lips over tureens full of shit? Powell, by contrast, does not allow the viewer either to ignore the terrible things that Mark is doing or to retreat into superior detachment. When I saw the film at one of Times Square's shoot-up palaces, the usual mutterings and drunken snores began to die down; during one tense scene a man wailed, "I can't stand this!"—but stayed to the end. A similar resentment at being implicated in Mark's sadism might account for the virulence of the 1960 reviews ("Shovel it up and flush it down the nearest sewer").

The boldness of Powell's challenge to the critics can best be seen by comparing *Peeping Tom* with another horror film laced with humor and released the same year amid similar charges of nastiness—*Psycho*. Hitchcock does not reveal what Norman Bates has been up to until just before the end of the film. Then, by adding the psychiatrist's explanation, he allows viewers to cool themselves off from the horror and suspense and to detach themselves from any sense of complicity. In our final brief view of Bates, he has become a figure of fun.

Far from relaxing the tension, the final sequence of *Tom* keeps tightening it to the end. The disclosure of the accessory mirror—the counterpart of Mother Bates's mummified corpse—is accompanied by an even more far-reaching revelation: that the whole house is fitted with microphones which have enabled Mark to listen in on the most intimate moments of his tenants' lives. That's not all. In the final two minutes, Mark kills himself amid a popping of preset flashbulbs and the babbling of multiple tapes; the police break in; the film runs out in Mark's projector; the screen fades to blackness with a ghostly exchange of words between Mark and his father.*

It may be argued that there are just too many events in the final sequence—that the revelation of the mikes, in particular, opens up such an unexpected and dizzying new perspective on Mark's voyeurism that it can scarcely be grasped at a first or second viewing. (No review I have yet come across mentions it.) Indeed, this argument could be extended to the whole film, which teems with detailed allusions, revelations, and ironies that may pass unnoticed even at a sixth viewing. But these elements, whether grasped consciously or not, contribute to the film's effect. Here is another reason for the tight structure analyzed earlier: without it, the details would threaten to overwhelm the film; with it, their centrifugal pressure becomes constructive, adding extraordinary tension to the ostensibly straightforward handling of the plot.

The comparison between top-flight Powell and off-peak Hitchcock may have been misleading: in *Tom*, despite its suspense and humor, Powell is not challenging Hitchcock at his own game; he is playing a different game entirely. Hitchcock likes plots that ramify, either by extending through space and time (*North by Northwest, Vertigo*) or else by focusing in turn on different characters (*Rope, Lifeboat*), with the various branches drawn together at the end. In *Frenzy*, which could share the same program note as *Peeping Tom* ("A sex killer at large in London; featuring Anna Massey"), the action ranges through a variety of settings (including a market, a hotel, a flophouse and other points of random human encounters), and from scene to scene the viewer may identify with any one of four or five characters. *Peeping Tom*, by contrast, stays almost entirely within three closed interiors (Mark's house, the commercial studio, the girlie picture studio) and its focus remains on Mark throughout. The film's variety comes from its details, and from the tier upon tier of metaphor which they conjure up.

Of the many networks of allusion that run parallel or interweave throughout the film, the most obvious is the linking of Mark's compulsion with the world of film, not only on the sexual plane discussed earlier but also in terms of artistic endeavor. Mark may be seen both as a psychopathic killer who happens to film and as a psychopathic film-maker who happens to kill—a perfectionist who's prepared to make any sacrifice for his art. Powell extends this ambivalent view of creativity to the commercial director for whom Mark works. In the first scene at the studio, the production chief dictates a memo to "all producers and directors: If you can see it and hear it, use the first take." From then on we see both the studio director and Mark alternately disregarding that order as their female leads fail to give the right performance—in Mark's case, to depict the supreme terror of death. With Viv's killing, Mark's documentary converges on the studio farce: both share the same sound stage; Mark holds his lethal Filmo right in front of the studio Mitchell; and later the two cameras run simultaneously to record the discovery of Viv's body.

Moreover, Powell contrives to implicate *Peeping Tom* itself in this equation by subverting the relationship between container and content, so that from time to time his own film appears to recede (as in the flip-flop of a Necker cube) inside the film-within-the-film. At the end of Helen's first visit with Mark, his gaze and ours linger on the piece of birthday cake she brought him; then a voice cries "Cut!" and the scene changes to the commercial studio. This sound-track appoggiatura suddenly identifies the fictional director with the person who is shaping the real film. Later, after another cut from Mark and Helen to the studio, the scene has a distorted perspective that suggests at first an error in Powell's filming; then a slow pan reveals that he has given an oblique view of the screen on which the commercial dailies are being projected. The most sustained self-implication is with Mark's documentary, right at the beginning: the through-the-viewfinder scene of the prostitute's last moments does not, like subsequent finder scenes, represent Mark's view, since he is

* In making this comparison I am not trying to boost Powell at Hitchcock's expense. I simply find that Powell is in top form throughout *Peeping Tom*, while Hitchcock falls well below his best in the second half of *Psycho*. It's ironic to look at the November 1960 issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, which includes two long and admiring articles on Hitchcock and *Psycho* and one short review of *Tom* by a critic so blinded by auteurism and anglophobia that he can write: "By what miracle does nothing [in the film's promising ideas] ever manage to arouse the slightest emotion in us? Not the slightest resonance, not the slightest shudder, not the slightest detail that throws off the slightest spark of beauty. . . ."

holding the Filmo at waist level; the subjective camera eye here can belong only to Powell.

The personal involvement of Powell in *Peeping Tom* branches off into a network of its own. In the black-and-white home movies that Mark shows Helen, Powell himself plays the father and his son plays Mark as a child. The exteriors of Mark's house show Powell's own home. Although Powell denies that the film is in any way autobiographical, he does say that as the filming progressed it became more intimate and enclosed.[3] Both the cast and the crew involve associations with other of Powell's films: Moira Shearer (Viv) also died for him in *The Red Shoes;* Anna Massey, daughter of Canadian Raymond Massey (who played the patriotic soldier at the end of *49th Parallel* and the anglophobe American in *A Matter of Life and Death*), is the outsider whom Mark admits into his secret world; blind Esmond Knight (studio director) appeared under Powell's direction in half-a-dozen earlier films; composer Brian Easdale had scored nearly every Powell film from *Black Narcissus* on. And Powell himself photographed the "home movies."

That network, too, connects with another: the relation between father and son. Although Mark's psyche was ruined by his father's experiments, he never rails against him; in fact, he lives in the same house and has converted his father's lab into his darkroom-cum-projection room. Throughout, the film stresses what the two men have in common, above all an involvement in filming: Mark is a focus-puller, and in the home movies we see his father approach the lens to adjust the focus; the psychiatrist brought in by the police as a consultant says of Mark, "He has his father's eyes." Some of the most extraordinary scenes revolve around the 16mm Kodak movie camera that Mark's father gave him as a child. In the home movies that Mark projects for Helen, his young self tries out the camera, panning until it points directly at Powell's camera—that is, at the viewer, at Helen (who cries "Switch it off!" at the sight of Mark's debut as voyeur) and at Mark himself. The Kodak now stands on top of the tape deck in the darkroom, and at the end of the film it appears in the foreground, surveying the dead body of Mark, half-conscious Helen, the police and the overturned projector. Then in an odd voiceover dialogue the father says, "Don't be a silly little boy," and Mark-as-a-child replies, "Good night, daddy—hold my hand."

While Mark's acceptance of his father's shadow even on objects he might easily have discarded may suggest the extremity of his sickness, it may also mean that he accepts his condition of life and sees little point in raging against a man whose actions may have been shaped by *his* heredity and upbringing. This alternative is supported by Mark's calm self-awareness and also by the touch of dignity that Boehm imparts to his speech and movement. A sense of responsibility for one's own life and actions and a willingness to follow one's destiny to the end would be the link between Mark and the heroes of Powell's patriotic-Tory films, such as the captain in *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* or Clive Wynne-Candy in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*—and also, in the light of his reaction to the 1960 debacle, Mark's "father," Powell himself.*

Reduced to verbal description, these networks of symbolism and allusion may already seem too heavy a burden for even the most compelling storyline to bear—and there are more to come. But on the screen they do not stand out baldly, one after another, like appendages to the storyline; instead, they are embedded in the whole fabric of the film. I will now pull focus myself to concentrate on that embedding—to show how such varied elements as movement, color, sets, costumes, make-up, sound, music, dialogue and cutting go into the making of the networks.

The dialogue deserves special mention. Leo Marks has a background in cryptography (a profession used overtly in his original story for *Sebastian*), and this seems to reveal itself in *Tom* in a penchant for verbal games. The dialogue is loaded with double meanings and dramatic ironies. Thus Milly, posing for Mark in the "girlie" studio, tries to hurry him up by saying, "Come on, sonny; make us famous"—an injunction he obeys near the end of the film by murdering her. Or when Helen tells

*It would have been understandable if Powell had blamed *Peeping Tom*'s failure on Leo Marks and avoided collaborating with him again. Yet not only did Powell co-produce *Sebastian*, based on a story by Marks, but also, he tells me, "We have just collaborated on a new film script, a gritty love story called *At Arm's Length*. I hope you may see it one day."

Mark that the publishers of her children's book about a magic camera want to illustrate it with drawings because they think photos would be impossible, he exclaims, "Nothing's impossible"; and when she's embarrassed by his offer to take the photos, saying there won't be much money, he replies, "There are some things I photograph for nothing." Yet the dialogue rarely seems overassertive, because it does not try to carry the dramatic weight by itself: its ironies and allusions refer not to other parts of the dialogue but to nonverbal elements of the film.* And in the major networks of allusion to which the dialogue contributes, Marks and Powell are content to let it play a minor role.

Consider the Freudian concept that Mark kills women whom he sees as whores but respects Helen because he identifies her with his mother. The costume and make-up of the first victim indicate that she is indeed a prostitute. For the other two victims, color is the key: with Viv, a close-up of the red light outside the sound stage door (reinforced by Mark's line, "I switched the red light on"); with Milly, a conspicuous scarlet lantern just above her head when she poses for Mark in front of a Paris backdrop. At first Helen too runs the same risk: not only does she have red hair, like Viv, but when Mark invites her into his darkroom he switches on a red light. Cutting first reveals the Helen-Mother equation: young Mark in the home movies reaches out to touch his dead mother's hand; Mark beside the projector reaches out to touch Helen's shoulder. Later, music plays its part: the elegiac slow waltz that accompanied the dead mother scene recurs when Mark looks into Helen's room, which was once his mother's.

Color and sound conspire to create a visceral atmosphere inside Mark's house—to suggest that these rooms and halls, and especially the secret world of his darkroom, are an extension of his body. Glistening browns and purples stand out from the shadows of the hall and stairway; varicolored lamps punctuate the gloom of the dark-

Just before killing himself, Mark tells Helen everything. He also plays her the tapes of himself crying and screaming as his father's childhood guineapig.

room. Many of the sounds in the house come from liquids: Helen's alcoholic mother sloshing whisky into her glass; Mark pouring photochemicals; a continual sharp drip in the darkroom; the roar of a filling bath that accompanies Helen's kiss for Mark (and his kiss for his Filmo) like an amplified rushing of blood. At the end, with the revelation that the whole house is wired for sound, as Mark simultaneously plays half-a-dozen tapes of his guineapig childhood, the tangle of screams and sobs and mutterings creates a new internal image —that of a brain discharging its memories.

This fusion of inner and outer worlds suggests why *Peeping Tom* is to be considered as more than a *tour de force*, more than a fascinating experience for film buffs, more than the best horror film ever made. Throughout his career Powell has shown a predilection for themes that allowed him to unite two opposing modes of perception: on one side, what might be called the outer, the objective or the real; on the other, the inner, the subjective or the imaginary.* Even his most realistic films make forays into the fantastic. In *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing*, a Dutch hideout for the downed

*I have found only one exception. At the end of Mrs. Stephens's encounter with Mark, when she asks, "What's troubling you?" and he turns away, she calls after him, "You'll have to tell someone!" In the climactic scene with Helen, Mark says, "Your mother said I'd have to tell someone, and I'm sorry it has to be you."

*Since Powell has shared credits with Emeric Pressburger on many films (though not *Peeping Tom*), it is worth quoting his statement on how they share the creative work: "I direct. Emeric writes the original story and screenplay. I write the final script and dialogue and then we both produce, i.e., take all the major decisions together, including editing." Concerning *Tom*, he says: "The script . . . was all Leo's own work. I had a lot to do with it, day by day, but Leo *wrote* it."

bomber crew has an unearthliness which foreshadows *Orphée:* the entry is by a stairway past a large curved mirror; the exit, by rowboat gliding silently along a subterranean channel. In other films the two modes are evenly matched from the start, and the viewer may not always be sure which is which. This applies to *A Matter of Life and Death,* which Powell still considers his most satisfying film:[1] the afterlife scenes may be viewed throughout as the delusion of injured Peter (David Niven); but when the doctor (Roger Livesey), killed in an accident, reappears at once on the other side and continues his efforts to help Peter, he carries a charge of reality over with him.

In *Peeping Tom* the two modes of perception are more than evenly matched: they remain inseparable throughout. On the one hand, the characters and settings look and sound as naturalistic as in any ordinary commercial film: where an artificial eyelid closed over the lens in *A Matter of Life and Death,* it is a real eye that opens at the start of *Tom;* where Sammy in *The Small Back Room* had delusions of a gigantic whisky bottle, Helen's alcoholic mother grapples with one of normal size; where the "Red Shoes" ballet used optical trickery to convert a flower into a knife, Mark's tripod becomes lethal with the simple removal of a sheath. On the other hand, the straightforward images and sounds of *Peeping Tom* reverberate with multiple circuits of metaphor, all of which connect with the master metaphor, film = life. Powell distilled his more than 30 years of film life into *Peeping Tom:* the madness of Sister Ruth from *Black Narcissus;* the ruthlessness of Lermontov from *The Red Shoes;* Sammy's fear as he tackles the unexploded booby trap from *The Small Back Room;* Wynne-Candy's romantic obsession with different incarnations of the same woman from *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp;* Joan Webster's struggle against her destiny from *I Know Where I'm Going;* and, for good measure, the unseen camera that recorded them all.

Perhaps the most startling element in *Peeping Tom* is not the sadism, or the reflexive role of film-making, or even the circuitry of metaphor, but the unwavering assurance with which it unfolds. If the cinema has a masterpiece of innocence in *Citizen Kane,* then *Peeping Tom* stands beside it as a masterpiece of filmic experience.

NOTES

1. From written answers to a questionnaire, September 1979.
2. *Films and Filming,* May 1960.
3. From statements made at a New York Film Festival press conference, October 1979.

CREDITS: Direction: Michael Powell. Script: Leo Marks. Photography: Otto Heller. Music: Brian Easdale. Distribution: Corinth Films.

NEW PERIODICALS, continued

Discourse ($9.00 per year or 3 issues, from Box 4667, Berkeley, CA 94704) is a new journal for theoretical studies in media and culture. The first issue contains a long interview with Christian Metz, an article by Bertrand Augst following up the cinematic implications of Foucault's ideas on the order of discourse, an article on Habermas and Marx by Paul Thomas, and an interview with Laura Mulvey. (Four of the editors of *Discourse* have disassociated themselves from the magazine and founded a new journal: *First Discourse,* Box 1236, 2000 Center Street, Berkeley, CA 94704.)

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CHARLES H. HARPOLE

Ideological and Technological Determinism in Deep-Space Cinema Images:

Issues in Ideology, Technological History, and Aesthetics

Serious discussion of the cinema phenomenon called "deep focus" (or great depth of field) began with a discursive series of essays by André Bazin. Prior to about 1940, there appears to be no mention of deep-space composition although "clear pictures" were often remarked upon. Since Bazin, however, considerable attention has been paid the issue of depth in the cinema image. This issue is viewed as one of the cornerstones of Bazin's theories and is mentioned prominently in most film history books. The discussion has been carried on partly by Henderson in distinguishing Bazin from Eisenstein,[1] in Charles Barr's seminal essay on CinemaScope,[2] in articles by Patrick Oagle and Jean-Louis Comolli,[3] and elsewhere.[4] The literature on "deep focus" is extensive enough to consider its discussion as a model for discovering the assumptions and directions of cinema theory making (and, by extension, the making of cinema history).

In fact, it is fruitful to confront the aesthetic, technological, and ideological assumptions in existing "deep focus" cinema theory with the rest of history. With this strategy, it may be possible to suggest by extension some more specificity and substance to the more general issues vexing current cinema theory and history.[5] Barry Salt's efforts seem to have a similar motivation in that, even given the limitations on his work, he is trying to test theory with observation of actual films.[6]

The history of comment on "deep focus" by name began when Bazin opposed his realist espousal of it (and of the long take) to very rapid cutting technique or montage. For Bazin, cinema is best when it most closely imitates his vision of what the real world is like. This *realist/idealist* stand thus affirms the quality of the long take since it presents "the world" in all of its "visible continuity," and of "deep focus" which allows all of the things to be clearly seen through this window on the world that is the cinema screen. For this reason, Bazin admires Welles, Wyler, and the central Italian neorealist films. The Bazinian tradition acknowledges, but seldom if ever explores, the implications of what the *mediation* of film creation processes does to the reality of the world when rendering a film. This flaw, this frequent ignoring of the fact that film is a mediated semblance of reality, lies at the heart of this realist/idealist stand.

Patrick Ogle continues Bazin's approach to film history, sharing the basic assumption that cinema history is a history of technological "improvements." This stand implicitly posits early films as primitive because they seem flat, grainy, shaky, monochrome, and silent. Later films become better as the realistic quality of the image seems to take on the "look of life itself," with full color, sound, dense visuals, and the like. Also this position which stresses technology tends to ignore the aesthetic and the ideological or, at least, to place technology above the aesthetic and beyond ideology. It implies that the technology is in control of the artist, and the affirmation of film history as a story of an always-enlarging paintbox of film tools denies possible full artistic status to *earlier* films. That is, this position posits "progress in art"—in itself a contradiction in terms.

The technological domination of cinema comment has held sway long enough. The cinema began, apparently, with inventors who desired a machine that could record reality. It continued mainly in the hands of those who took realism as their mechanical and even aesthetic guide. But the

history of the cinema is more than the story of its hardware, and the cinema theorist and historian must more skillfully marry aesthetic and other considerations to technological facts in order to produce more encompassing conclusions.

Jean-Louis Comolli's six-installment article in *Cahiers du cinéma* introduces another element into the discussion of film history, theory, and "deep focus" specifically. Comolli takes a materialist view of history and thus is at overt odds with the Bazinian tradition. He rejects the idea that the "history of cinematographic language" is a progression of an ever-increasing "technical treasury from which film-makers would freely draw."[7] He decries that cinema history/theory which is obsessed with the "progress of the language."[8] Above all, he seeks the *ideology* inscribed in the cinema and writes off all those who do not recognize its importance. His materialist approach means that he is concerned with the economic factors of cinema as well as with investigations based on the means of production. He centers upon the history and sociological implications of the production of realist film images, especially via deep-space illusionism. He sees the act of history writing as a reading of the past in terms of the present.

Comolli's piece is an important challenge to the current view of film history, as well as critics' goals for films. His essay certainly deserves a full English-language translation.[9] Thus far, his work has stirred much interest among the SEFT/*Screen* group in England. Christopher Williams has gone so far as to write, "Comolli's project . . . poses the greatest challenge to film criticism and theory . . ." since, perhaps, Bazin.[10] Williams also says that Comolli has affirmed and practiced Julia Kristeva's idea of semiology as the study of film as "signifying practice which is concerned *strictly* with the production of sense as opposed to the re-presentation of a fixed sense. . . ."[11]

Comolli's most apparent contribution, in addition to a materialist critique of Bazin, is his call for studying films within their ideological and economic settings—using the term "ideology" to refer to the basic world view and assumptions that reside within and underpin a film work. He says that ideology structures both the form and the content of film, but that ideology and its operations are usually hidden, especially from spectators partaking of the same culture as that of a film. That is, the cultural ideology or way of being is usually too much a part of the observer *in* the culture for him to see the ideology embedded in films. (Comolli implies, but does not show, how the decoding of a film via semiological methods alleviates this problem.) For example, he says that it was the immeshed idealist ideology that allowed Bazin to applaud films that depicted the world on film in the way that the world looks when observed directly. Bazin's and bourgeois ideology generally wish to see a filmed world that is just like its real one, Comolli says, because that is comfortable and requires no thought/work. Then a "deep focus"/long-take realistic style was what "sold" well at the boxoffice, and, Comolli's reasoning continues, the dominant producers of films—Hollywood and its imitators—made realist films in order to make money. Thus, he says, the dominant ideology and economic forces dictated the direction and limits for the craftsmen and artists of the cinema.

This brings up a question that has lurked behind art patronage since it began—how should critics deal with the fact that what comes to be considered art many times was produced for non-artistic reasons—for a demanding patron, for money, and so on. For example, does the fact that the Church commissioned many paintings now considered classic art in any way diminish their artfulness? Is *Triumph of the Will* less a work of art because it was ordered by fascists? If even Hitler commissioned a work that emerged as beautiful, can its ideology make it less than great art? In both cases, the "patron's" ideology is certainly represented, but can *art* be critiqued on the basis of the critic's agreement or disagreement with the ideology of the works? The answer, I suspect, resides more in the critic's subjective goals for art than it does in reasoned aesthetic theory. Then, on the face of it, it seems that an ideological critique such as Comolli's is fundamentally anti-aesthetic, and thus somewhat limited.

Even within his ideological critique, Comolli is confusing. For example, at points, he implies that the dominant class produced Hollywood films that reaffirmed the realist view of the world in order to reassure the other classes, the audiences (at first the lower class and then later also the middle[12]), that the world *is* just as it looks. This was done in

Deep-space composition in William K. Howard's TRANSATLANTIC (1931—*cameraman, James Wong Howe*) ►

order to perpetuate control (and sales?). At other points, Comolli implies that it was the bourgeois audiences who dictated film realism via their tastes and ticket-buying proclivities. The contradiction is not resolved in the six-part article.

Of course, Comolli is quite correct in insisting that film history must take economic pressures into account. Very little of this job has been done, partly, I suspect, because film studios do not want trained scholars digging around in their company records. However, until major inroads of documentary evidence are made into production financial processes, just saying that economics must be taken into account is important but is also not the end of that line.

Further, without such research, errors such as those cited by Douglas Gomery[13] will continue to occur. Gomery's research shows that Comolli and many other film analysts have misunderstood the reasons for Warner Brothers' adoption of sound films. Gomery's careful work demonstrates the danger of relying upon existing histories when making ideological or any other kind of analyses.

Nevertheless, Comolli's critique of Bazin, Mitry, and Lebel is very strong on the level of theory. He refutes their contention that the camera is a neutral recording instrument, a passive unarticulated registration of pro-filmic events. This critique goes to the very heart of the Bazinian conception of film—the unique and one-to-one relationship between the world and the film image. The scope of this article precludes tracing out the whole realist illusionism argument, but the illusion of depth upon the plane surface of the film screen is one of the essential ways film evokes the impression of reality. Bazin felt this depth to be essential to the best in film. Comolli, a film-maker as well as a critic, undercuts this notion by pointing out the abstract nature of all depth illusions.

The presence and nature of deep-space illusions in films are important to Bazin because they give realism to the image. They are important to the technological historian since so many devices are required to produce them. And, to Comolli, depth effects in film are important since they indicate the extent to which an ideological way of representation is embedded in a mass medium.

In the observations that follow, I wish to weave an *aesthetically historical* way through the material Comolli treats only ideologically, Ogle treats only technologically, and Bazin treats idealistically and polemically. Here, I wish to study specific deep-space images that were created and to trace these creations through a part of the history of cinema.

Depth illusionism is created in films in several highly specific ways. These methods are based upon the inescapable fact that spectators perceive films with the same physiological and psychological equipment with which they perceive real life. Many of the conventions of perception in the world carry over into understanding the cinema. The analogy has been carried very far, even to the point of comparing the eye blink to the cut and the pan to a turn of the head. McLuhan has not been the only one to observe that the cine-camera may well be thought of as an extension of human sense organs. How far this analogy should really be taken remains problematic, but current science observes the following factors to be the depth cues within films:

(a) overlap of a nearer object over a far one (the prime cue);
(b) comparison of relative sizes of known objects;
(c) movement by objects within the visual field (the kinetic depth effect), especially toward and from the observer;
(d) movement by the viewpoint, by the observer or camera;
(e) a viewpoint which foreshortens;
(f) reflections (such as in mirrors or in pools);
(g) perspective (aerial, detail, and linear);
(h) relative intensity of sounds from known objects;
(i) cast shadows;
(j) "attached" or "surface" shadows (modeling);
(k) degree of highlights on objects;
(l) relative brightness of a known source of reflection; and,
(m) color (aerial perspective changes colors over distance, for example).

That is, filmic depth is evoked perceptually through *position* (of people and objects and camera)—labeled "a" through "h" above—and through light—"i" through "m." Cinematic devices can be made to "play" these cues: for example, when a wide-angle lens is used, it seems to spread space.

As will be seen in the following discussion of particular films, these cues have been used in mainstream films to express interpersonal and intrapersonal states of characters via proxemics—the spatial relationships of people to people and/or of people to objects in their environment. Frequently, depth compositions are used to evoke irony via juxtapositions within the *mise en scène.*

Deep space is also used to create realist atmospheres as well as to give actors more room in which to act. The range of usages is indeed quite large. Both the wide open spaces of spectacle films (or Westerns) and the claustrophobically small areas of a ship's rooms, for example, have been expressed via deep space arrangements. Wide-angle lenses, necessary for great depth of field, stretch optic space and also thus alter the pace of ordinary movements. Too, with such lenses, proportional and linear perspective are emphasized.

Focus and pictorial composition are, after all, ways of leading the eye of the spectator and of establishing the conventionalized codes by which the film can be read. Film scenes done in-focus uniformly through the depth of the space can cue the spectator to read the *mise en scène* as a whole, with decor details sometimes as important as actors. Proxemic information is read with the same conventionalizations that are used in real life. The codes of depth compositions have a highly specific origin, as has been noted. The history of the evolution of these depth compositions in films remains to be seen.

One of the major critical strategies advocated by many European semiological/ideological writers, Comolli included, is the search for key "structuring absences" within the body of a work. The "gaps" or "lacks" control the shape and "message" of a film, it is said, as much as the "presences." Applying this strategy to Comolli's article, I find that a perplexing "absence" there is the discussion of actual films in detail. An occasional photo caption does not make a fully worked out critique of the cinema, but this is, in effect, all Comolli gives his readers about specific films. Here is a case in point.

One of the most important historical statements Comolli makes about deep focus is that its usage "disappeared for 15 to 20 years," or from about 1920-25 to about 1940.[11] After noting that depth of field from the beginning of film to about 1925 was used "naturally" (i.e., because it "came with" the technology of the early camera/lens systems), he posits the disappearance of depth effects then and their reappearance with *Citizen Kane.* This schema about the evolution of a form through film history is also the view of Patrick Ogle.[15] Ogle believes that in about 1925, film depth style gave way under the combined press of technology and the influence of then-current fashions in still photography. Comolli says that the change away from depth came not just because of changes in fashion, but rather, also, because of an ideological switch from the cinema's use of "reality codes" to the use of "narrative codes"[16] and because of the coming of sound: "the depth of the spoken presence greatly replaced that of depth of field."[17]

The proof Comolli offers for this switch is a single statement from Brunius that Renoir had great difficulty in finding some "old" good depth of field lenses in order to film in depth his *Partie de Campagne.*[18] Renoir, he says, was the exception to the rule of the disappearance of depth. Bazin and Jean Mitry also agree with this conclusion, but explain the change on the basis of film-makers' choices rather than as Comolli does. Ogle, for his part, reasons that the change was due to the advent of panchromatic film stock, which brought lower-output incandescent or Mazda lamps onto the set, which in turn reduced the possible depth of field since there was less light and the camera diaphragm had to be opened up more than before (when orthochromatic film and arc lamps were in use).

An actual observation of films from the disputed period of 1925 to 1940 has led me to a different conclusion about depth style during this time. Pictorial deep space representationalism, instead, can be seen to evolve in a non-linear way along a broad gradient of styles/usages *throughout* the history of film. Depth styles can be observed before, during, and after the period of 1925-1940.

From about 1895 through 1925-29, three overall styles of pictorial depth can be generalized. The first stylistic period of 1895 to 1914 is characterized by much exterior shooting (and "interior" settings which used the sun for light); high-detail, hard-focus; and great depth of field. There is, however,

little to no use of zones of light for depth effects. Other perceptual indicators of depth, such as foreshortening or camera movement are also sparse during this time. Linear perspective and the overlap of nearer objects over far ones are heavily relied upon.

However, heuristically, it is possible to say that film-makers' "thinking in depth" has its origin at the moment when the camera was placed at a diagonal to its subject rather than "head on" at right angles to the dominant line within the chosen framing. The Lumière *L'Arrivée du Train en Gare* (1895) is a prototypical example of this effect. There, linear perspective and the relative size of objects, as well as the approach of the train, immediately key upon basic depth perceptual codes. Additionally, the very power and aesthetic attractiveness of the film is based upon the fact of this depth composition. Briefly, some other typical films of depth arrangements are: *Attack on a Chinese Mission* (1900) with movement toward the camera that explores the depth of the space; *The Pumpkin Race* (1907, Bozzetti?), same; *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (1912, Griffith), same—with the addition of a surprising moment in which important additional narrative information is only gradually revealed in the depth of the frame after other events have acted themselves out in the foreground; *Les Victimes de L'Alcool* (1912, Gérard Bourgeois), same—with an astonishingly sharply focused image throughout the space of the interior sets; and *Suffragette in Spite of Himself* (1912, British Edison Company), same.

It is with an Italian film, *Assunta Spina* (1914, Serena), that one can mark another phase of the evolution of depth compositional style. This film uses, in one frame at the same time, both interior and exterior spaces that involve great depth of field, sharp focus, and two planes of narrative action interacting between two planes of depth in the screen. This effect is not limited to a single scene but is a conscious device worked into the whole of the film.[19] Within the period of about 1914 to about 1919, these kinds of depth features also appeared in films such as *Cabiria* (1914, Pastrone); *The Italiam* (1914, Ince); *Das Haus Ohne Tür* (1914, Rye and cameraman Seeber); *The Coward* (1915, Ince); *David Harum* (1915, Dwan and cameraman Rosson); *The Birth of a Nation*

ASSUNTA SPINA (1914): *deep-space composition carried from interior through to distant exterior*

(1915,Griffith); *Intolerance* (1916, Griffith); and, by Maurice Tourneur, *Poor Little Rich Girl* (1917), *The Blue Bird* (1918), and *Victory* (1919).

The large spectacle scenes, such as in the Pastrone and the Griffiths, are all done in great depth of field. Tourneur, especially, created a foregrounded framing device done in backlighted silhouette with important dramatic action taking place in the mid- and reargrounds as set against the surrounding matter that occupies the foreground.[20] These examples and the others make this period distinctive for the deployment of depth of space in simultaneous interior and exterior spaces, in extensive and complex linear perspective, and in narratively important to and fro movement of people through the spaces. It is a period when one could say true "thinking in depth" had come of age.

The next period, 1919 to about 1929, can be delineated, first, by the milestone films that "bound" it and also by the evolutionary features of depth composition within it. *Das Cabinett des Dr. Caligari* (1919, Wiene) can be taken as a beginning milepost since it characterizes the increased stress upon a refined *mise en scène,* with textured sets and painted-on "zoned" light (which creates spaces within the visual field which seem to have a great deal of light, while other areas of the field are in relative darkness). The German expressionist tradition created depth effects primarily in the sets rather than in real lights or with hard lenses. Films such as *Raskolnikow* (1923, Wiene), *Schatten* (1923, Robison), *Der Letzte Mann* (1924, Murnau), *Die Freudlöse Gasse* (1925, Pabst and cameraman Seeber), *Geheimnisse Einer Seele* (1926,

Pabst and Seeber), *Varieté* (1925, Dupont and cameraman Freund), *Metropolis* (1926, Lang and Freund), and the like are ample examples of this effect.

At the same time, in this period, Eisenstein and Tisse were creating remarkable depth compositions in the Soviet montage cinema tradition and Tourneur, Stroheim, Ford, Ingram, and Murnau were creating shots in great depth of field in the Hollywood tradition (Murnau having moved during this time). Eisenstein, who was so interested in creating juxtapositional relationships between shots, also created juxtapositions of images, often ironic, *within* the depth of single-shot compositions as well. Ivor Montagu notes, "He [Tissé] also mastered the art of achieving unprecedented depth of focus, thus giving Eisenstein a third dimension for the compositional 'conflicts' in which the graphic elements of his images were relationally arranged."[21] The depth of space rendered in the Odessa steps sequence of *Potemkin*, for example, is as much a part of the artistry as the editing.

A film such as *Mikaël* (1924, Dreyer) shot by Freund and Maté should also be cited for its interior depth creations to show both the visual compositional style of the time and the fact that national boundaries can not be used as a guide in tracing the evolution of this formal filmic element. Depth composition in 1919 to about 1929 can be seen to stress a greatly detailed refinement of *mise en scène*—especially in textures, some zoned lighting, and in to and fro movement—and a mixture of shots in great depth of field and closer, softer ones. This period blends into the next, somewhat, but it has its distinctive depth style.

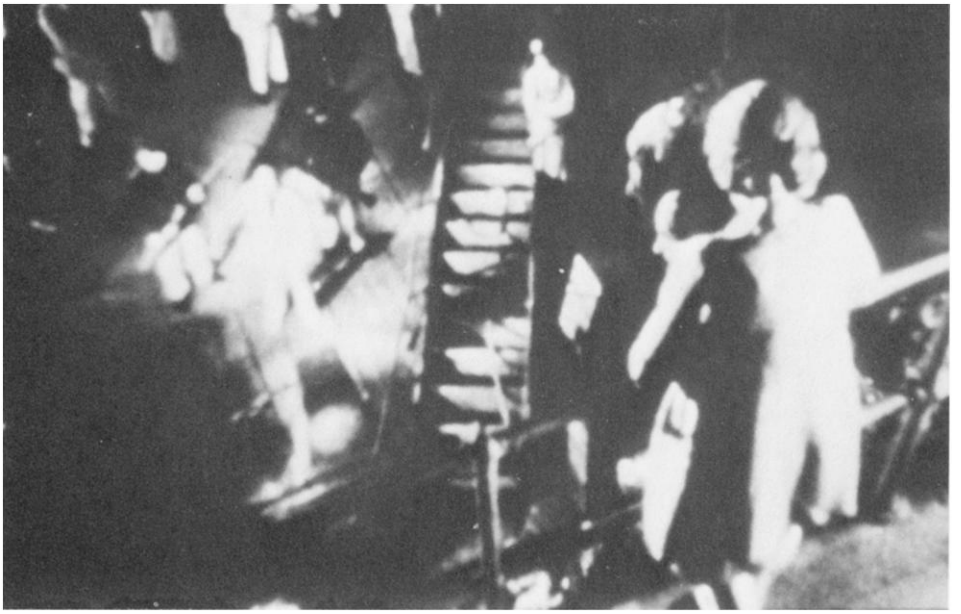
The crucial question posited earlier in this article, however, centered upon the time of roughly 1925-29 to about 1940-41: the period in which it is so generally thought that depth composition disappeared. The evidence from films of the time belies this conception.

The evolving gradient of deep space illusionist creation in this time can be seen to begin with *Bulldog Drummond* (1929), although it is probably impossible to put one's finger on any one film as a final milepost for the trends I observe in this period. Nevertheless, from actual film evidence, it is clear that the period is marked by refinement

BULLDOG DRUMMOND (1929): *This is the best obtainable still from this film, though not a good example of depth.*

and great complexity of lighting in zones and the deployment of two and three planes of important, interacting "business" within the space of single film frames. Depth-perception indicators for the spectator now include sound and a fine-grain visual look. Moreover, the moving camera, clearly evident in this period (despite the limitations imposed by early sound technologies), explores and reveals a great depth of space. The dimensions of this space are beyond that for which the period has been given credit by current cinema commentary. Here are some films from *Bulldog Drummond* to *Citizen Kane* which demonstrate the depth gradient:

Bulldog Drummond (1929) was directed by F. Richard Jones, shot by Gregg Toland and George Barnes, designed by William Cameron Menzies, and produced by Goldwyn for United Artists. The rather large-appearing sets of this film are shot in great depth of field and the camera moves within them. The lobby and Drummond's room at the Inn are very deep and the characters move through the space in ways that emphasize and dramatically use the expanse. Sharp focus is maintained on the scenes throughout—from front to back—without focus-pulling. More remarkable is the long "pull back" of the camera from within the mad doctor's torture room through great depth, all in focus. At another moment in the film, a very long and twisted stairway—reeking of German expressionism—is shown with the camera angled down, emphasizing the depth via foreshortening, with a character very near the camera at the top and another very far at the bottom. Linear perspective



CONDEMNED (1929): *A steeply angled shot with two planes of action. (Ruggles; cameramen Toland and Barnes)*

amplifies the distance between them. Later in the film, a shot through the foregrounded chemistry apparatus toward the mad doctor in the midground also includes in its visual field the door in the distance which leads to the victim's room. Odd shadows on the rear wall add to the atmosphere as well as the depth of the scene. Importantly, all in one shot and in-focus are the elements of horror and a reminder of where the torture is to be practiced.

The many shots in *Bulldog Drummond* done in great depth of field seem to exist, first, to add a sense of realism to what is a somewhat improbable story (at times self-satirical, even); and to increase the playing area for the actors in this action-mystery-adventure genre which includes fistfights and chases. The depth is not of the Orson Welles variety nor do many of the scenes dramatically depend on its presence, but the fact remains that extensive depth of field does occur in this film. Too, some of the perceptual codes of depth are heightened to a great degree—linear perspective and camera movements, typically.

It should be remembered that from 1929 to 1931, films with scenes of great deep space compositions such as *Condemned* (1929, Ruggles, with Toland and Barnes on cameras, and Menzies on set design), *Morocco* (1930, Sternberg, with Garmes), *Billy the Kid* (1930, Vidor, with Avil), *The Bat Whispers* (1930, Roland West, with Ray June and Robert Planck on cameras), *Que Viva Mexico!* (unfinished, 1931, Eisenstein, with Tisse), and *The Criminal Code* (1931, Hawks, with Howe and Tetzlaff) were being made. Just after the latter film, James Wong Howe shot William K. Howard's *Transatlantic* (1931), a film which Ogle also notes "prefigured" the depth of *Kane.*[22]

Transatlantic contains many, if not all, of the features of the full deep focus films of the forties. The chase in the engine room is an excellent example since the shots there are from a variety of angles (with foreshortening) and objects and people are deployed over multi-plane space in depth. Parts of pipes and jutting machinery often fall in the close foreground and ship stairways and balconies recede into the far background while the hero and the villains chase through the space both horizontally and vertically on ladders as well as into the depth. This scene is done in very great depth of field. In other sequences, oppressive ceilings hang over the principals and props seem to be set in the foreground just to stretch the depth of the settings. Outstanding depth set-ups occur in the scenes of goodbyes from dock to ship, in the radio room, at the climax outside the room where the old man has been shot, and generally in many crowd scenes. Too, the camera is often moving which gives even greater depth indication. James Wong Howe says, on

> the picture, *Transatlantic*. . . . I used wide angles, deep focus throughout, long before *Kane*. Eighty per cent of the picture was shot with a twenty-five millimetre lens. . . . I carried focus from five feet back to twenty, thirty feet. . . . I argued with the art director, Gordon Wiles: I wanted ceilings to give the claustrophobic feeling of a ship. He did full ceilings and half ceilings for me, and I used special lights in the engine-room to give an illusion of depth, with special sets of machinery one behind the other.[23]

Some of the scenes in this film look like *The White Circle*, a 1920 Maurice Tourneur film—the continuity of this effect seems to be pervasive.[24]

Charles Barr, in his well-known article on CinemaScope, has noted the thirties depth of field work of Renoir, Hawks, and Ophuls. Of the latter two, he says that for "the organization of the space within the image," one should "see especially *The Criminal Code* and *Liebelei*. These, together with *Boudu*, make up a marvelous trio of early sound films, which if one relied upon historians one would scarcely know existed, for according to most theories they oughtn't to."[25] *Liebelei* (1932) was shot by Franz Planer who worked with Freund, Murmau, and Pommer. An excellent study could be done by tracing depth styles by cameramen and the influences upon them.

Other films which deserve attention for depth compositions are *Alias the Doctor* (1932, Curtiz), *Today We Live* (1933, Hawks) with ceilinged sets, and *The Story of Temple Drake* (1933, Stephen Roberts with cameraman Karl Struss). Interestingly, the young Orson Welles made his first film, *Heart of Age*, in this same period (about 1934). The film is short, about ten minutes, black-and-white, silent, and with many of the marks of a "student" film. It shows German expressionist-type of style in its odd angles and horror make-up, but there are little to no depth arrangements in it.

Almost everyone who has bothered to comment has noted that Renoir was composing films in depth all during the 30s. Bazin cites him as the precursor of Welles;[26] Comolli says Renoir was the exception in his use of deep spaces;[27] Ogle notes the same;[28] and Barr speaks of Renoir "compensating for the narrowness of the frame by moving the camera laterally and composing the scene in depth.[29] Renoir himself is quoted as saying, "I feel it necessary to have the scene set in depth in relation to the screen . . ." and to "set my actors freely at different distances from the camera. . . ."[30] The Renoir films in question are, most outstandingly, *Boudu Sauvé des Eaux* (1932), *Une Partie de Campagne* (shot in 1936), *Toni* (1934), *La Grande Illusion* (1937) and *La Regle de Jeu* (1939). Certainly, each of these films has many scenes pictorially composed in good depth of field. But, at least in the prints that are now available, the visual evidence from the screen shows no really sharp focus within the great depth of field. That is, the scenes are obviously set up with perspective, movements, and extensive spaces to allow room for the simultaneous juxtaposition of people (and/or things) within the same frame—usually for ironic effect—and everything visible is equally in focus. However, real "deep focus" is not in evidence since highly focused detail—high definition—is just not there, is just not a part of the visual information from the screen.

The conclusion, then (tempered by the possibility of my seeing muddy prints), is that with Renoir and perhaps others, there is another facet to the broad gradient of depth compositional usage within the history of film. Renoir, it seems, created dramatically important actions and details of the settings in relationships *in depth*. This style was rendered through the use of great depth of field, but not with highly detailed, sharp focus. An overall grey patina is the result, giving the visuals an ambience of softness even though no one deep plane is more in focus than another. It could be speculated that this effect was intentional, but it is also possible that technological limitations such as low light levels dictated the "look." (Efforts to determine the ideology of such an effect are also reduced to speculation—did Renoir wish to soften the blow of his narrative realism!) The thing we can be sure of is that Renoir is a careful artist, which implies that he would put nothing on the screen that he did not wish there. The meaning of what is there is left to generations of critics. The importance of what is observed here is the fact of depth composition visible on the screen.

To continue the documentation of whole films or film moments done in pictorial deep space in the thirties, films such as these must be also considered: *Viva, Villa!* (1934, Conway, Hawks, and others, with cameraman Howe), *Song of Ceylon* (1934, a Grierson group documentary), and—all

in 1935—*The 39 Steps* (Hitchcock), *Mad Love* (Freund with Toland), *The Dark Angel* (Franklin, with Toland), *The Scoundrel* (Hecht and MacArthur, with Lee Garmes), *Gold Diggers of 1935* (Berkeley, with George Barnes), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Reinhardt and Dieterle, with Hal Mohr), *The Flame Within* (Goulding, with Howe), *Crime and Punishment* (Sternberg, with Lucien Ballard), and *The Great Ziegfeld* (Leonard). As can be seen, depth styles transcend traditional genre classifications.

In 1936, Hal Mohr shot two films, *Green Pastures* (William Keighley and Marc Connelly directing) and *Bullets or Ballots* (Keighley), which further exemplify the period's interest in deep space compositions. Mohr says he shot these films (and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, noted above) with a kind of swing lens system he invented.[31] (The details of the device, now, are less important than the fact that these films and Mohr's description of his lens are evidence of the desire for depth in this period.) In these two films, actors are rendered in sharp focus throughout one selected, angled plane into the depth of the screen. The fact that far and near characters are in focus is important to the development of the visual style; it is not gratuitously inserted.

In 1936, films of depth such as *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (Lorentz, with Strand, Hurwitz, and Steiner), *These Three* (Wyler, with Toland), and *Fire Over England* (W. K. Howard, with Howe) were made. This is also the time of Eisenstein's efforts toward completing *Bezhin Meadow*, the remains of a work that show abiding interest in the juxtapositional possibilities of deep space cinematography.

Rudolph Maté, cinematographer for Dreyer's *Joan*, became, in 1937, the cameraman for Mayo's *The Adventures of Marco Polo*. In this otherwise rather unremarkable film Maté created a lighting effect prototypical of one "look" done in this period prior to classic deep focus. Maté used arc and incandescent lamps together on the sets of the Orient sequences. This effect, it has been suggested, was used in this film to give Polo's arrival in the Orient a "different look."[32] The combination succeeds since the arcs and "inkies" together produce a shimmering depth effect that seems at one glance to recede markedly in sharp focus and at another glance, appears soft and lacking in hard focus. The effect produces a very soft quality to the outlines of the edges of objects, but within the same picture are hard-edged shadows and very white highlights. The quite visually pleasing picture thus both affirms and denies the codes of depth illusion. The result is an atmosphere of fantasy or "other-worldness" that both allows the eye's explorations of the space and calls attention to its own flatness via its softness.

Depth is also in evidence in *Ready, Willing and Able* (1937, Enright, with Polito) with its big dance number on giant typewriter keys, all in deep and hard focus; *The Good Earth* (1937, Franklin, *et al.*, with Freund and Vorkapich); *The River* (1937, Lorentz); *Dead End* (1937, Wyler, with Toland); *Lost Horizon* (1937, Capra, with Walker); *Kidnapped* (1938, Werker, with Toland); and *The Goldwyn Follies* (1938, Marshall, with Toland). It should be noted that two of these films received Academy Awards for cinematography—evidence of some interest in depth camera work/set design, at least. (1938 was also the year of the production of Eisenstein's and Tisse's *Alexander Nevsky*, with its startling depth effects.)

In 1939, Ford directed *Stagecoach* (with Glennon and Binger on cameras). This film not only employs the wide open spaces typical of the history of the Western genre, but also emphasizes characters' interpersonal relationships with deep space arrangements. The bar room, for example, is done in claustrophobic ceilinged settings, with long perspective and the foregrounding of objects for depth effect, and with the implied space of the exterior (from which will come the angry John Wayne) suggested with an open door in the background.

That was the same year as *Le Jour Se Lève* (Carné, with Courant), *Intermezzo* (Ratoff, with Toland), *Wuthering Heights* (Wyler, with Toland), *Of Mice and Men* (Milestone, with Brodine), and *Gone with the Wind* (Cukor, Fleming, *et al.*, with Haller, Rennahan, Garmes). The existence of moments of deep space compositions in these films also puts the lie to the idea that *Citizen Kane* was the "first" film to show a proclivity for "thinking in depth."

Immediately preceding *Kane*, 1940-41 brought such important depth films as *The Long Voyage Home* (Ford, with Toland) with its frequent two-

plane depth in shots through the ship's rigging, for example; *The Grapes of Wrath* (Ford, with Toland) heavy with wide landscapes and long diagonal lines; *Down Argentine Way* (Cummings, with Shamroy and Rennahan); *How Green Was My Valley* (Ford, with Miller) which sets the in-focus environment against the people; *The Maltese Falcon* (Huston, with Edeson); and *Ball of Fire* (Hawks, with Toland). Then, in 1941, came *Citizen Kane*, and an avalanche of critical comment centered on "deep focus" began.

From the evidence in many films, then, it must be concluded that interest in deep-space cinema composition has been present from the beginning continuously (in varied forms) through the forties. Further elaboration has traced the inclination in more modern times.[33] From the beginning, however, the representation of depth has been *an* element in filmic creation. Depth usages historically can be seen to trace through a broad gradient of styles that *evolved* but did not "progress"—neither chronologically nor by national cinemas. "Thinking in depth" did not originate with *Citizen Kane*. Moreover, a history of the phenomenon of pictorial composition in depth must be traced along its broad gradient since *this* is the evolutionary pattern of the form. The writing of the history and theory of pictorial compositional styles has really just begun in cinema studies.

BULLETS OR BALLOTS (1936): *A film shot by Hal Mohr with a lens permitting sharp focus on an angled plane.*

NOTES

→ Brian Henderson, "Two Types of Film Theory," *Film Quarterly*, 24, No. 3 (Spring 1971), 33-41.

→ Charles Barr, "CinemaScope: Before and After." *Film Quarterly*, 16, No. 4 (Summer 1963), 4-25.

3. Patrick Ogle, "Deep-Focus Cinematography: A Technological-Aesthetic History," *Filmmakers Newsletter*, 4, No. 7 (May 1971), 19-33 and reprinted with footnotes and a bibliography as "Technological and Aesthetic Influences Upon the Development of Deep Focus Cinematography in the United States," *Screen*, 13, No. 1 (Spring 1972), 45-72. Jean-Louis Comolli, "Technique et Ideologie: Camera, Perspective, Profondeur de Champ," *Cahiers du cinéma*, No. 229 (May-June 1971), 4-21; No. 230 (July 1971), 51-57; No. 231 (Aug.-Sept. 1971), 42-49; No. 233 (Nov. 1971), 39-45; No. 234-235 (Jan.-Feb. 1972), 94-100; and No. 241 (Sept.-Oct. 1972), 20-24.

4. Charles H. Harpole, *Gradients of Depth in the Cinema Image*, NY: Arno Press, 1978.

5. Discontent with existing cinema history is pervasive: see for example the special issue of *Cinema Journal*, 14, No. 2 (Winter 1974-75). Some hope for a cure for the generality of current film histories is promised with the creation of a ten-volume international history of cinema, now planned, under the editorship of Charles Harpole. The current state of flux in cinema theory can be observed by reviewing Harpole and Hanhardt, "Linguistics, Structuralism, and Semiology, Approaches to the Cinema," *Film Comment*, 9, No. 3 (May-June 1973), 52-59; Graham Petrie, "Alternatives to Auteurs," *Film Quarterly*, 26, No. 3 (Spring 1973), 27-35; Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Appartus," *Film Quarterly*, 28, No. 2 (Winter 1974-75), 39-47; and Pascal Bonitzer, " 'Realité' de la denotation," *Cahiers du cinéma*, No. 229 (May-June 1971), 34-41, as well as others.

→ Barry Salt, "Statistical Style Analysis of Motion Pictures." *Film Quarterly*, 28, No. 1 (Fall 1974), 13-22; | → 'Film Style and Technology in the Thirties," *Film Quarterly*, 30, No. 1 (Fall 1976), 19-32; and → "Film Style and Technology in the Forties," *Film Quarterly*, 31, No. 1 (Fall 1977), 46-56.

7. Comolli, No. 233, p. 40; see footnote 3. Translation by Charles Harpole.

8. Comolli, No. 231, p. 45.

9. Part of Comolli's serialized essay has been translated and published as "Technique and Ideology: Camera, Perspective, Depth of Field," *Film Reader*, 2 (January 1977), 128-140.

10. Christopher Williams, "Ideas about Film Technology and the History of Cinema, with Reference to Comolli's Texts on Technology (*Cahiers du Cinema*)," BFI/SEFT Seminar Paper, London: SEFT, April 26, no year, p. 3.

11. Williams, pp. 3-6.

12. Work by Douglas Gomery refutes this claim also (that early film was only for the lower classes); see his dissertation as well as his later work published in scattered articles.

13. J. Douglas Gomery, "Writing the History of the American Film Industry: Warner Brothers and Sound," *Screen*, 17, No. 1 (Spring 1976), 43-44, 53.

14. Comolli, No. 233, p. 43.

15. Ogle, from the *Screen* version of his article, p. 51.

16. Comolli, No. 233, p. 43.

17. Comolli, No. 234-235, p. 100.

18. Comolli, No. 234-235, p. 96.

→ Ted Perry, "Formal Strategies as an Index to the Evolution of Film History," *Cinema Journal*, 14, No. 2 (Winter 1974/75), 25-36.

20. Richard Koszarski, "Maurice Tourneur: The First of the

Visual Stylists," *Film Comment*, 9, No. 2 (March-April 1973), 24-31.
21. Ivor Montagu, *With Eisenstein in Hollywood*. NY: International Publishers, 1967, p. 25. See also Eisenstein's *Notes of a Film Director*. NY: Dover, 1970, pp. 132-133.
22. Ogle, *Screen*, p. 45.
23. James Wong Howe in Charles Higham, *Hollywood Cameramen*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1970, pp. 83-85.
24. Koszarski, p. 30.
25. Charles Barr, p. 21.
26. André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* Translated by H. Gray, Vol. 1, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, p. 34.
27. Comolli, No. 234-235, p. 95.
28. Ogle, *Screen*, pp. 47-48.
29. Barr, p. 143.
30. Barr, p. 143.
31. Hall Mohr, "A Lens Mount for Universal Focus Effects," *American Cinematographer*, 17, No. 9 (Sept. 1936), 370-371.
32. William Stull, "Maté Blends Arcs and Inkies to Light MARCO POLO Stages," *American Cinematographer*, 19, No. 6 (June 1938), 234, 238-239.
33. Harpole, *Gradients of Depth in the Cinema Image*, Chapters 10, 11, and 12.

KATHERINE S. KOVACS

Miguel Littín's **Recurso del Método:** The Aftermath of Allende

In March 1976, Chilean director Miguel Littín's *Actas de Marusia (Letters from Marusia)* was nominated for an Academy Award as best foreign film. Littín's official recognition by the Hollywood establishment was not without irony. As a filmmaker from the so-called "Third World," he had long been committed to the principle of national cinema, rejecting both the aesthetics and subject matter of Hollywood movies.

Littín is one of a number of directors from various countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America who began to make movies in the sixties. Although they worked independently and developed their own distinctive styles, they became associated with the Third World film "movement" because of a shared interest in new cinematic forms and a commitment to social change. Ousmane Sembene in Senegal, Jorge Sanjines in Bolivia, and Glauber Rocha in Brazil were some of the directors who believed that the transformation of consciousness was an integral part of social revolution. They felt that film could play an important role in countering what Antonio Gramsci had called "ideological hegemony"—the beliefs, values, cultural traditions, and myths which create a consensus that perpetuates the *status quo*.[1] In their search for ways of expressing the unique cultural identities of their own people, they rejected conventional love stories with happy endings, focused upon the fate of the group rather than the individual, and reclaimed forgotten or distorted historical incidents as well as devalued national traditions as subjects for their movies. These filmmakers saw themselves as fulfilling a higher mission than entertaining audiences. They made movies to expose conditions of life in underdeveloped countries and to arouse people to take action to change those conditions.

Littín's filmography reflects the ways in which those movies were linked to politics and social issues. His first feature, *El Chacal de Nahueltoro (The Jackal of Nahueltoro)*, released in 1969, was made under the progressive pre-Allende government of Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei.[2] This film is a recreation of an actual crime which had been a topic of national controversy. "Jackal" is the name given by the press to an illiterate Chilean peasant who went on a drunken spree, killing a woman and her five children. He was captured, rehabilitated, and eventually executed. Littín used the crime to show the subculture created by poverty, to criticize the sensationalistic aspects of the

Visual Stylists," *Film Comment*, 9, No. 2 (March-April 1973), 24-31.
21. Ivor Montagu, *With Eisenstein in Hollywood*. NY: International Publishers, 1967, p. 25. See also Eisenstein's *Notes of a Film Director*. NY: Dover, 1970, pp. 132-133.
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23. James Wong Howe in Charles Higham, *Hollywood Cameramen*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1970, pp. 83-85.
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26. André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* Translated by H. Gray, Vol. 1, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, p. 34.
27. Comolli, No. 234-235, p. 95.
28. Ogle, *Screen*, pp. 47-48.
29. Barr, p. 143.
30. Barr, p. 143.
31. Hall Mohr, "A Lens Mount for Universal Focus Effects," *American Cinematographer*, 17, No. 9 (Sept. 1936), 370-371.
32. William Stull, "Maté Blends Arcs and Inkies to Light MARCO POLO Stages," *American Cinematographer*, 19, No. 6 (June 1938), 234, 238-239.
33. Harpole, *Gradients of Depth in the Cinema Image*, Chapters 10, 11, and 12.

KATHERINE S. KOVACS

Miguel Littín's **Recurso del Método:** The Aftermath of Allende

In March 1976, Chilean director Miguel Littín's *Actas de Marusia (Letters from Marusia)* was nominated for an Academy Award as best foreign film. Littín's official recognition by the Hollywood establishment was not without irony. As a filmmaker from the so-called "Third World," he had long been committed to the principle of national cinema, rejecting both the aesthetics and subject matter of Hollywood movies.

Littín is one of a number of directors from various countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America who began to make movies in the sixties. Although they worked independently and developed their own distinctive styles, they became associated with the Third World film "movement" because of a shared interest in new cinematic forms and a commitment to social change. Ousmane Sembene in Senegal, Jorge Sanjines in Bolivia, and Glauber Rocha in Brazil were some of the directors who believed that the transformation of consciousness was an integral part of social revolution. They felt that film could play an important role in countering what Antonio Gramsci had called "ideological hegemony"—the beliefs, values, cultural traditions, and myths which create a consensus that perpetuates the *status quo*.[1] In their search for ways of expressing the unique cultural identities of their own people, they rejected conventional love stories with happy endings, focused upon the fate of the group rather than the individual, and reclaimed forgotten or distorted historical incidents as well as devalued national traditions as subjects for their movies. These filmmakers saw themselves as fulfilling a higher mission than entertaining audiences. They made movies to expose conditions of life in underdeveloped countries and to arouse people to take action to change those conditions.

Littín's filmography reflects the ways in which those movies were linked to politics and social issues. His first feature, *El Chacal de Nahueltoro (The Jackal of Nahueltoro)*, released in 1969, was made under the progressive pre-Allende government of Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei.[2] This film is a recreation of an actual crime which had been a topic of national controversy. "Jackal" is the name given by the press to an illiterate Chilean peasant who went on a drunken spree, killing a woman and her five children. He was captured, rehabilitated, and eventually executed. Littín used the crime to show the subculture created by poverty, to criticize the sensationalistic aspects of the

press, and to condemn the workings of the Chilean system of "justice."

The movie unfolds in a series of flashbacks which culminate midpoint in the film—when the Jackal commits the murders. Littín uses a hand-held camera and rapid cutting to recreate the crime in all of its brutality. He does not downplay the violence of the act. Nevertheless, by juxtaposing the Jackal's first-person account with reports in the press, by interweaving past and present events, the film-maker suggests the extent to which this crime was a misguided protest on the part of the Jackal.[3] There are no villains in the movie. The prison guards, the priest, even the soldiers who execute the Jackal treat him humanely. The real villains of the piece—the government, the landowners, the foreign investors—remain off-screen. Their presence is nevertheless implied in Littín's shots of barren lands, dilapidated huts, dirt roads, and people dressed in rags who wander through the countryside looking for work and for food, getting drunk or committing crimes along the way. By means of a fluid and evocative camera style and with the aid of dramatic lighting effects, Littín presents an indictment not merely of capital punishment but of a system from which the majority of the population is excluded.

The Jackal of Nahueltoro was enthusiastically received both in Chile and abroad. When the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende came to power, Littín was appointed head of Chile Film, the national film agency. During the Popular Unity years, he shot his second feature, *La Tierra Prometida (The Promised Land).* It was based upon an episode which took place in the thirties, when a socialist republic was briefly established in Chile. Littín focused on one uprising in the North and built his screenplay around the recollections of actual survivors. He again used the technique of a first-person narrator, an old man who participated in the uprising in his youth (and who appears in the story as well). Stylistically, however, *The Promised Land* represents a radical departure from the neorealist mode of *The Jackal of Nahueltoro.* In its use of brilliant colors, choreographed symbolic sequences, religious symbols, processions and songs, it shows the influence of Glauber Rocha and of Hungarian film-maker Miklos Janscó.

Throughout the movie, the linear narrative is disrupted—and enriched—in a variety of ways: scenes are repeated from different angles, two moments in time are presented simultaneously, historical reality is mixed with mystical and legendary events (most notably, with the appearance of the Virgin of Carmel at various intervals throughout the film). In addition to using a narrator, Littín includes folk songs and speeches by

other characters which give multiple perspectives to the same event. The film is rich in allusions to history and to myth; completed just two months before the coup, it also suggests strengths as well as weaknesses in Allende's Marxist government.

After the military takeover, Littín fled to Mexico where he edited the movie. His first film in exile, *Letters from Marusia*, dramatizes another incident in Chilean history, a famous strike in the copper mines at the turn of the century which was brutally repressed by the army. While similar in theme to the Argentinean movie *La Patagonia Rebelde* which also deals with a mine strike in the 1920's, *Actas de Marusia* is more violent and intense. The ochre tones which predominate throughout the film emphasize the barrenness of the region and the misery of the miners' lives. The conflict between the striking workers and the mineowners is presented in a series of mass scenes in which the violence continually escalates. In these scenes, Littín expresses his outrage over the coup which deposed Allende: the torture scenes, the hostages, the executions, and the final massacre are clear references to events in Chile following the takeover by Pinochet. Thus in *Actas de Marusia* there is little delineation of character; Littín is less interested in the protagonist, a miner named Gregorio, than in the movements of the strikers and of the soldiers who massacre them. As the director noted in an interview: "Each of my movies corresponds to a moment in Chilean political life, especially *Actas de Marusia*. The Chilean army, contrary to the myth which people held for a while, has always been composed of members of the *petite bourgeoisie*, who, acting in the interests of those in power, crush and assassinate the people."[4]

Littín's latest film, *Recurso del Método* (1978), corresponds to another moment in Chilean—and Latin American—political life. It suggests that in response to the upheavals of recent years, the director has been led to reevaluate some of the premises of revolutionary film-making. For the first time, Littín does not deal specifically with Chile, nor does he recreate an historical event. *Recurso del Método* is based on a 1974 novel of the same name by Cuban author Alejo Carpentier,* which presents the life and times of an unnamed president of an unidentified Latin American country from the first decade of the twentieth century through the late twenties. Carpentier's imaginary land is an amalgam of every country in Central and South America. It has coffee and sugar plantations (run by United Fruit) as well as mines. Its terrain is alternately mountainous, swampy, or covered by forest lands which are subject to torrential rains. The population is composed of blacks, Indians, and European immigrants who celebrate Carnival and worship the Holy Shepherdess.[5] In describing life in this country, Carpentier deals with the cultural, social, and political changes which took place in the first decades of the century in Latin America as well as in Europe. The novel shows the ties between internal events in the New World and the progression of international politics. The underlying theme is that of dependency in all of its forms: Latin America's economic dependency upon the United States and its traditional cultural dependency upon Europe and especially France.

Littín was probably attracted to Carpentier's book because it dealt with such fundamental elements of the Latin American experience as dependency, dictatorship, and imperialism. After six years in exile, cut off from Chilean political life and from Chilean audiences, Littín undertook the project in "an effort to assume my identity as a Latin American, to analyze the options open to a political exile in Latin America: that is to say, the necessity to struggle not only for the freedom of one's own country but also for the freedom of the entire continent. . . . That means for me, under the circumstances, taking a subject from a Cuban writer, filming in Mexico, in Paris, in Cuba, with Argentinean, Chilean, Cuban, Mexican, Venezuelan, and French actors and technicians."[6]

Recurso del Método is the first Cuban-French-Mexican coproduction. As Littín suggests, it is a coproduction not only in the sense that it was jointly financed and filmed in three countries, but also because it was conceived as a true collabora-

*Carpentier's book was translated under the title *Reasons of State*. There seems to be some question over what the English title of the movie is. In the publicity materials distributed by the producers, it is called *Reasons of State*, but when the film was shown at the Cannes festival in May 1978, it was called *The Recourse to the Method*, while at the Los Angeles Filmex showing in April 1979 the title was given as *Viva el Presidente*. The film has not yet received commercial distribution in the United States.

tion, a collective statement on the part of those who made it. In the credits at the end of the movie, the names of the actors and of the crew members are listed along with their country of origin. Besides Littín, a number of other people who worked on the movie are political exiles. The lead actor who plays the part of the dictator is the Chilean Nelson Villagra. He was The Jackal in Littín's first feature. When Allende fell, he went to Cuba.

The making of *Recurso del Método* was an act of Third World solidarity. It gave its participants a chance to reenact both their collective history as Latin Americans and their individual experiences with repressive governments. In this reenactment, France was implicated not only because of the subject of the novel (a reflection of a long-standing tendency among Latin American intellectuals and artists to look to French culture for appropriate models) but also because a number of well-known French leftists were instrumental in the making of the film. The film was produced by Frenchwoman Michèle Ray-Gavras. An outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War, she was captured by the Viet Cong and held for three weeks. Later on, she went to Bolivia on the trail of Che Guevara's diary. She was there at the same time as French Marxist theoretician Régis Debray, who, along with Jaime Augusto Shilley, collaborated with Littín on the screenplay of *Recurso del Método.* In 1967, Debray spent two months with Che Guevara in his mountain camp in Bolivia. He was subsequently captured by the Bolivian army. When he was released from jail four years later, he went directly to Chile.[7] The participation of these former activists suggests that the making of the film was an effort to establish an exchange not only among Latin American countries but also between France and the New World, an exchange which would shatter the traditional pattern of dependency.

The choice of a novel by Alejo Carpentier was therefore most appropriate. Of all of the novelists of the so-called "boom" in Latin American narrative fiction, Carpentier is perhaps the most "European" by virtue of his background, education, and interests. His father was French; his mother was Russian. They settled in Cuba shortly before he was born. Carpentier was educated in France and has probably spent half of his life there. He was associated with the Surrealist movement there in the late twenties and thirties. Since 1968, he has been Cuba's cultural attaché to France. He has explored the impact of French civilization and history on Latin America in his earlier works of fiction.[8] In *Recurso del Método* he is therefore on familiar ground when he presents a francophile dictator who maintains a house in Paris in the shadow of the Arc de Triomphe. The action of the novel alternates between Paris, where the president goes to rest, and his homeland (he is called back each time an uprising occurs).

The Spanish word "recurso" used in the title implies this perpetual "running back" *(recurrere)* from France to South America. It also suggests the periodic recurrence of certain events: uprisings at home, stays in Paris, addresses to the nation, pursuit of enemies. In spite of the dictator's incessant movement, one has the impression of repetition, immobility, cyclical time. The title *Recurso del Método* is also of course a reference to Descartes's *Discours de la Méthode* from which Carpentier quotes at the beginning of each chapter. The transformation of the word (as well as its translation from French to Spanish) embodies the differences between the two continents. For as the dictator himself reminds the reader, the conditions of life in the New World are such that the Cartesian *cogito* is not a valid model of interpretation. "No carnivorous plants grow, no toucans fly, nor do you find cyclones in *The Discourse of Method.*"[9] With its strange vegetation, torrential rains, volcanos, and impenetrable jungles, the reality of the New World can only be considered fantastic when judged by European standards.[10] In such an environment, men do not act "reasonably," and the Cartesian discourse becomes "recourse to method" —recourse to brutal methods of repression.

Throughout the book, Carpentier emphasizes the differences between the European systems of thought and those of Latin America by juxtaposing European discourse with Latin American reality. In addition to Descartes, Carpentier quotes from other French philosophers and writers. The novel is filled with references to artists, works of art, and musical pieces associated with the period immediately before and after World War I. Such allusions underscore the fact that these works are irrelevant to the pressing problems of Latin Amer-

ica. The books which the president reads and the art which he collects do not make the brutal dictator a civilized man—they are mere pastimes for his moments of leisure.[11]

But Carpentier's enumeration of the names and artifacts associated with French culture is so excessive that at times one suspects that they are little more than a virtuoso display of erudition by an upper-class Latin American intellectual who is infatuated with Europe, expecting the reader to share a deep familiarity with French cultural history in order to grasp his allusions and appreciate his "in-jokes."[12] *Recurso del Método* is thus addressed to the educated classes of Latin America and Europe. There is a strong element of parody or even self-parody in the cultural quotations, but this novel, and indeed Carpentier's entire literary production, has been considered by certain doctrinaire leftists to be "immobile" or even "reactionary."[13]

A few years ago, Littín might have agreed with this judgment. He might even have dismissed Carpentier's meditations upon French culture as elitist. In his earlier films, foreign cultures were presented as areas of foreign domination; indigenous myths and traditions were extolled as veritable "elements of the class struggle."[14] This was appropriate in the early seventies, when Littín was working with the Allende government, when he saw in film-making a potential way of mobilizing the people, an integral part of the revolutionary praxis. But since the fall of Allende, perhaps Littín has been led to reassess his role as a film-maker and to modify his cinematic style. His decision to make a movie based on this novel by Carpentier suggests that he now favors humor to protest, that he prefers analysis to denunciation.

While he was making *Recurso del Método* Littín noted: "This film will enable me to show the mechanisms which make military dictatorships possible in Latin America. . . . I don't want to make a period piece. There is an historical constant in the mechanisms of imperialism which must impose dictatorships to continue to dominate people."[15] Thus Littín saw in Carpentier's novel an ideal vehicle for examining the ways in which imperialism abroad is manifested as dictatorship at home.

The dictator's propensity for French culture is but one of a number of elements which figure into this analysis. While remaining quite faithful to the novel (producing much of the dialogue and many of the scenes), Littín uses Carpentier's allusions to French culture in the context of settings, lighting effects, and editing techniques which reveal the underlying mechanisms of dictatorship. The movie opens with a shot of a darkened room. A hammock is suspended in the corner. Snoring is heard. As the camera slowly moves in, an alarm clock sounds. A voice from the hammock grumbles, "But I only just went to bed. Almost 7:15?" A hand emerges and searches for a pair of eyeglasses. A middle-aged man looks at the clock and discovers that it is 10:15. The camera now focuses upon his face in the semi-obscurity. A nun appears and opens her habit showing her naked breasts. The man staggers out of bed and opens the curtain to reveal the Arc de Triomphe looming in the distance. The camera then abruptly cuts away to a quotation: "My intention is not to teach here the method that each one must follow to guide his reason with certainty, but only to show the way I have tried to guide mine.—Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode.*"

The juxtaposition of Descartes on the importance of cultivating one's reason with shots of a man trying to wake up after an evening spent with a prostitute (the "nun" whom he recalls upon awakening) inaugurates an ironic tone for the film and suggests several themes which will be explored in humorous ways throughout the film: the contradictions between appearances and reality, public actions and private behavior, civilization and barbarity. Indeed, the dictator asleep in his hammock becomes a veritable leitmotif throughout the film. He is invariably hung-over and asleep when his aide runs in to inform him that some important event is taking place. In this initial sequence, Littín associates the dictator's hammock with the quotation from Descartes. Throughout the rest of the movie, he will dispense with the quotations, or rather substitute for them the visual image of the hammock.

Littín uses a variety of cinematic techniques to unmask the dictator. In the Paris sequences, which consists mostly of interiors, the rooms are cluttered with sculptures, paintings, mirrors, and lamps. The characters almost dissolve in the light which reflects off these multiple shining surfaces. Occa-

sionally Littín shoots the action (especially scenes of lovemaking) in mirrors so that we are looking at a reflection rather than at the action itself. As Littín observed:

> We want a diffusion of light. We want the lights to break the characters a little, to destroy the setting where they live so as to reveal these corrupted people who live in a sort of permanent play of mirrors where they are miserably reflected. This is not a light which constructs but which destroys, it is a play of reflections between truths, lies, ambiguities, and from the joining of all these elements, the spectator will be able to draw a conclusion, to become clearly aware of what a dictatorship is.[16]

Littín does not want us to become involved in the specific personality of the protagonist or to search for his psychological motivations as one would in a conventional novel or movie:

> I want to make one think about the dictator's conduct: there is nothing extraordinary about him, he acts like an ordinary *petit bourgeois* who dominates his family—he controls his country in the same way. I don't want this film to act on the spectator's emotions, but on his consciousness. So the dictator can seem nice and understandable in his behavior, but at the same time, he reveals the extent to which he himself has been destroyed by the ideology of imperialism. Because the dictator is not an individual phenomenon, he is not his own creation, but is a product of society. Therefore I didn't want to stress the individual.[17]

To distance us from the protagonist, Littín often begins a scene with a long or middle shot so that the camera is situated at a discrete distance from the actors. This enables the audience to see them at the same time that we take in their surroundings. At other times, he opens a sequence with a panning shot, as if to enumerate the relation between objects and the formal aspects of a scene's composition. We then move in on the principal characters in the midground or background. But we never get very close to them: there are almost no close-ups in the film. Such an interplay between characters and surroundings establishes a dialectical movement which keeps the spectators from being drawn into the action. Moreover, the pacing of this three-hour film is slow: Littín avoids building up any suspense, which would keep us from maintaining a detached point of view.

Littín also distances us from the protagonist by inserting a narrative voice at intervals throughout the movie. This technique is borrowed from the novel, where there are frequent shifts from first-person to third-person narration. At times Littín's narrator anticipates events which we are about to see or tells us what the dictator was thinking at a certain moment. There is always an ironic tinge to his commentaries. Is this the voice of an historian who has done research on the president's life? If so, the triviality of his observations points up the insignificance of the dictator's life. Is this Carpentier's omniscient narrator? In that case, his interventions give the impression that a story is being read aloud and dramatized before our eyes. By mediating between the viewer and the action in this way, the narrator calls attention to the predetermined nature of the dictator's responses. He further underscores the contrived or invented aspects of the movie action.

There is a repetitive quality to all of the sequences set in the dictator's homeland. He spends his time attempting to control those individuals or groups who oppose him and employs all of the familiar tactics of dictators everywhere. Each time that he plans or executes another brutal action he says: "So that they may learn a lesson." But of course "they" never do, and the embattled president must travel to the North or to the South to bribe or to kill his enemies. The number of spectacular set pieces engendered by this perpetual warfare is truly astonishing. *Recurso del Método* is a lavish movie, with a large cast of extras; its scenes of battle, revolts, demonstrations, massacres, and carnivals are choreographed as if for a ballet. By dint of repetition, these scenes come to be predictable, mechanical; the impression grows that we are outside of the realm of history, locked in an eternal present.

The two major revolutionary leaders who oppose the president at different times reinforce this impression in that they too are symbolic mythical figures. There is Miguel Estatua (Michael Statue), the black revolutionary artist whose name is his program of action; later on, a rather nondescript man called "The Student" comes to challenge the president. But it is clear that both the dictator and his adversaries are abstractions in a Brechtian sense, linked in a situation from which there is no escape. *Recurso del Método* is ultimately a Latin American morality play, in which the forces of left

and right respond in predetermined patterns. For most of the movie they are stalemated until The Student calls a general strike which threatens to ignite a revolution. To restore the "balance," the American ambassador intervenes. One morning he awakens the president with the news that he has been removed from office, replaced by a long-time rival who will use a new rhetoric to continue the same policies. Revolution has once again been averted.

Thus in a two-minute scene, the 20-year, two-and-a-half-hour reign of the protagonist is brought abruptly to an end. The rapidity with which the change of government occurs dramatizes the extent to which the dictator was but a puppet of foreign governments. If the film ended at this point, we might conclude comfortably that, through his skillful use of such Brechtian devices as distance, irony, and spectacle, Littín has presented the collective history of Latin America since the days of independence while remaining remarkably faithful to Carpentier's novel. But Littín chooses to end on a more personal note. In the film's final moments, there is a definite change in mood.

Somehow, the president eludes the crowds waiting to kill him and escapes to Paris, where he lives out his final days ridiculed and then forgotten. No longer interested in a French culture which he cannot understand (these are the roaring twenties), the dictator moves upstairs to the attic of his mansion. There he spends his days with his faithful housekeeper-mistress, with the former ambassador to France, and with his daughter, listening to melancholy tango music and eating dishes from home. As a gentle autumnal light filters through the attic windows, the ex-ambassador tells the ex-president that with the diplomatic seals of the country which he has appropriated, he will continue his former business of adding citizens to the ranks of his country: he will keep selling false passports. He estimates to have made 30,000 already, for "all of the poor people who have been left without a country." The ex-president, who is now one of these poor people, approves this venture.

In these scenes our attitude towards the dictator undergoes a change. We do not forget all of the atrocities which he has perpetrated, but he is clearly revealed to have been an unwitting agent of forces which he never really understood and certainly could not control. At the end of the movie he is a nonentity, reduced and then eradicated by these same forces of imperialism. Cut off from his homeland, his existence played out in a single room, the dictator accepts this degradation. He even refers to himself as "the ex," which stands for exile as well as ex-president.

The kind of reduction which he has undergone parallels Littín's own experience in exile. As he said:

> What exile does to an individual is to exterminate his creative capacities, like a plant which dries up because it misses its roots, its country, the air, the sea, the soil, the people, the words he loves, the sentences which motivate him, the gestures which are his. . . . While I was filming this character in Paris, I didn't feel like I was filming in Paris, because this film constitutes a history lesson for many countries: he [the dictator] feels that he is in a distant place, a stranger, and I feel that way as well.[18]

The emotional quality of the film's final moments suggests the extent to which Littín identifies with the dictator and with the others who are living out their lives in attic rooms. Corrupted and finally destroyed by imperialism, they are representative of the thousands of Chileans, Cubans, Argentineans, and others of all political persuasions who have been forced to flee Latin America. Some of them have gone to France, the traditional haven for political dissidents and the spiritual home of many Latin American intellectuals. Others are resettled in Spain, in Mexico, in Canada, in Venezuela. Wherever they are, they can surely identify with Littín's feelings of alienation and helplessness, with his nostalgia for home, and perhaps even with his perception that the mechanisms of dictatorship exist independently of the will of any single individual or group.

Recurso del Método reminds us that in order to abolish dictatorship in Latin America it is not enough to overthrow any particular dictator. Basic changes in the power structure will be necessary. Here as in earlier films, revolution is presented as the necessary inevitable alternative for Latin America at some time in the future, some time after the film has ended. But in *Recurso del Método* the date of that future rendezvous with revolution becomes problematic. While in the novel's final pages Carpentier shows The Student in the company of Nehru and of Julio Antonio Mella (founder of the Cuban Communist Party) actively engaged in planning what the reader understands will be the future successful revolution, in the film Littín omits this episode: his gaze remains resolutely

fixed upon the dictator, suggesting that in spite of periods of democracy in Uruguay, Argentina, Chile and elsewhere, in spite of the "triumph" of the Cuban revolution, social and economic conditions in Latin America have improved only slowly and unevenly since the beginning of the century. Much remains to be done; the condition of exile remains a fundamental aspect of the Latin American experience.

But Littín's movie suggests the extent to which this condition may color one's perceptions. From his vantage point, the forces of imperialism seem so overwhelming that ultimately even the most despicable tyrant is absolved of responsibility. The possibilities for true social change seem ever more remote—in exile both dictators and revolutionaries are out of the fray, bypassed by history, and unable to see the extent to which the struggle at home may be continuing without them. Thus Littín's film ends on a pessimistic note, which may be more indicative of his personal feelings than of the future possibilities for social and political justice in Latin America.

NOTES

[As we go to press, we learn that Littín has just finished shooting a new film, *La Viuda de Montiel* (The Widow of Montiel), based on a short story by Gabriel-Garcia Marquez; shot in Mexico, it stars Geraldine Chaplin, and is a Mexican-Venezuelan-Cuban coproduction.]

1. Carl Boggs, *Gramsci's Marxism* (London, Pluto Press, 1976), p. 17.
2. Prior to this movie, Littín had been assistant director to Helvio Soto on *Yo Tenía una camarada* (1964).
3. When asked why he killed this family, The Jackal answers: "So that they wouldn't suffer."
4. Anne Pierquet and Brigitte Morissette, "Miguel Littín, Cinéma Révolutionnaire et Cinéma en Exil," *Cinéma Québec*, V, No. 3 (1976), 14. Translations for all of Littín's interviews from French or Spanish are my own.
5. In the movie Littín faithfully conveys this mixture by using actors from different countries. A variety of Spanish accents are heard throughout the film.
6. Marcel Martin, "Brève rencontre avec Miguel Littín," *Ecran* 77 No. 63 (15 novembre 1977), 10.
7. Debray talked with then President Allende. It was there that he met Littín, who recorded the conversation between Debray and Allende in a documentary he made in 1971 entitled, *Compañero Presidente*.
8. Both in *El Reino de este mundo (The Kingdom of This World)* and in *El Siglo de las Luces (Explosion in the Cathedral)*. Carpentier focuses upon events in the Caribbean at the end of the eighteenth century. He shows the foundering of the ideals of the French Revolution in the New World environment, suggesting that the voodoo cults, beliefs in magic, mixture of races and tropical nature could never be encompassed in European patterns.
9. Alejo Carpentier, *Reasons of State*, trans. Frances Partridge (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 19.
10. This is Carpentier, *Reasons of State*, p. 139: "Bullets and machetes for bastards. But complete liberty of criticism, polemics, discussion and controversy concerning art, literature, schools of poetry, classical philosophy . . . and everything else in that line . . . that's culture."
12. Carpentier defines the dictator by mentioning the fact that he commissions a work from an academic sculptor rather than from Rodin, that he enjoys Daudet's editorials in *L'Action Française* (a rightwing paper), etc. At one point early in the book, one of his friends recommends that he read Gobineau's book, *On the Inequality of Human Races*, which enjoyed considerable favor later in the century among the Nazis because of its praise of the Aryan race.
13. Manuel M. Escriva de Romani, "Alejo Carpentier recurre a René Descartes," *Camp de l'Arpa: Revista de literatura*, 17/18, (febrero-marzo, 1975), 49.
14. Michael Chanan, "An Interview with Miguel Littín," *Chilean Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1976), p. 63.
15. Martin, "Brève rencontre," *Ecran*, 11.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

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JOHN FELL

Motive, Mischief and Melodrama: The State of Film Narrative in 1907

Viewing the earliest surviving movies in rough chronological order, year-by-year at least, is to witness film exposition pull itself out of the mud-banks and evolve into a semblance of narrative shape. Its progress is erratic, with false starts and paths untaken, but seems to evidence a kind of inexorable logic; run-on time and space bow to pre-designed complications with increasing regularity.

This is not the place to recapitulate what has been discussed elsewhere in substantial detail, but it is useful to note that by 1906, consolidation with respect to organized, pre-delineated narrative design begins to assume consistent visibility. Some techniques (like motivating a subjective view by a glance, then following it with a matted shot to simulate perspective through a viewing glass or telescope) translate comfortably from one story mode to another: *Grandma's Reading Glass* (G. A. Smith 1898), *Tour du monde d'un policier* (Pathé 1905).

Other devices such as shot-to-shot continuities facilitated through unmatched movement,. seem to derive more directly out of a particular kind of narrative, like the chase. Pursued and pursuer contained in one shot give way to pursued/pursuer/pursued/pursuer checkerboarding, what Christian Metz chose to term an Alternate Syntagma. In *The Hundred-to-One Chance* (Vitagraph 1906), we shift from a racing car to incidents at the spot toward which the car is bound.

With this background, 1907 becomes a year of curious interest. It is poised just before Griffith's appearance as a writer/director, and stands, too, at a sort of midpoint: a decade beyond the very appearance of movies, about equally distant from a regular cycle of "features."

Film output accelerates year to year in this period, and more is preserved. We have to qualify our understandings in terms of particular material that has survived, but as the years pass, we may undoubtedly tread with greater confidence on a groundwork of archive holdings. The titles under consideration come from Denmark (Nordisk), Italy (Rossi and Co.), France (Gaumont, Pathé, Eclipse, Méliès), and England (Sheffield, Hepworth, Urban Trading, Warwick Trading, Cricks and Martin, Clarendon). More often than elsewhere, film is American (Belcher and Waterson, Biograph, Edison, Kalem, Lubin, Miles Brothers, Selig, Vitagraph, Winthrop).[2]

Film lengths vary. Occasionally a single setup, one-shot title evokes earlier history. More often, stories involve several locations, commonly both interior and exterior. Continuity blends (like matching action and screen direction, tempo and position to join exits and entrances) register as increasingly smooth. Much of the output falls within a 300' to 700' range, roughly five to twelve minutes running time. Very occasionally the viewer finds himself startled by an unexpectedly motivated shot-to-shot congruence. In *Francesca di Rimini: or The Two Brothers* (Vitagraph. LON), which derives from a passage in Dante, the hunchbacked nobleman Francesca raises his gaze as if cued by some distinct sound. Cutaway to a point-of-view shot detailing the approach of a messenger. Cut back to Francesca, messenger entering screen left. The same film contains two additional motivated pairings: Francesca looks fondly at an insert of his wife's miniature in a locket. Overall, such moments are infrequent, and 1907 appears little characterized by formal innovation.

Our intention here is to center on the year's output, as far as it has been reviewed, in terms of its kinds of stories, to investigate whether such formulas, as with the chase, may begin to inflect expository techniques. By categorizing the film product, we can also more concisely describe its character, a worthwhile undertaking because so

much "new" material has become available through archive cooperation in the last few years. A rough sort of categorization can group the year into eight sorts of storytelling:

Adaptations

Francesca di Rimini is on example. *"Teddy" Bears* (Edison. Edwin S. Porter, dir. MMA) enacts *Goldilocks* with costumed teddies to capitalize on the new doll. Chased by the animal family, Goldilocks comes upon a hunter who shoots Papa Bear and Mama Bear dead and enslaves Baby Bear on a chain, apparently to provide the girl with a new toy.

Water Babies: or the Little Chimney Sweep (Clarendon. Percy Stow, dir. LON) reproduces the Victorian Charles Kingsley children's story. It contains another motivated continuity when Ellie, the little girl, stands at water's edge. Her glance precipitates a camera pan left, far enough to exclude the human figure, then back.

Reenactments

Stages actualities take several forms. *Daniel Boone* (Edison. Wallace McCutcheon, dir. MMA) has the frontiersman and a companion rescue two girls from Indian capture. It draws on stage convention (a horse unties the other man, shackled to a burning stake) and popular stereotype (Indians fight dirty, but always lose to their white brothers). *The Hooligans of the West* (also *Hooligans of the Far West*)[3] (Pathe. LON) begins as a staged documentary (cowboys capturing wild horses), then reverts to fiction. Again a horse comes through, this time carrying a captured man's scarf to a cavalry camp and leading the unit to the rescue. Actuality merges with show-staging in *Attack on an Emigrant Train* (Biograph. MMA) which films a Wild West performance that includes a painted mountain backdrop.

Another sort of reenactment appears in *The Unwritten Law* (Lubin. MMA), based on the Harry Thaw/Stanford White New York City murder. Here the film requires a viewer's precedent understanding of the contemporary scandal; otherwise one could never make sense of motives and characters. Intertitles ("The Red Velvet Swing") capitalize on journalistic versions of key incidents. Ceilinged sets appear twice (as painted flats): a boudoir equipped with overhead mirrors, a courtroom. Alone in his cell, the murderer relives his crime and a jailhouse visit from his mother and Evelyn Nesbit by way of a dream balloon.

Trick Film

These productions maintain but do not expand upon Méliès's magic traditions. *Sister Mary Jane's Top Note* (Hepworth. Lewin Fitzhamon, dir. LON) shows the disastrous consequences of a singer's upper range, with furniture and pictures dashed to the ground. *Tryllesaekken (The Magic Bed)* (Nordisk. Viggo Larsen, dir. COP) begins with a comic stage tumbling act, evolving into stop-motion antics. One or both of two acrobats disappear-reappear inside a mattress bag. [*The Roses*] (Gaumont. GEH) and [*Chrysanthemums*] (Pathé. GEH) are hand-colored, short ventures playing on transformations, the first using butterfly motifs, the second Japanese costume and stage-derived use of mirrors to magic effect.

When the Devil Drives (Urban. W.R. Booth, dir. LON) is an elaborate fantasy in which the devil takes command of a passenger train. Its journey across the heavens and under water strongly suggests Méliès's *Le Voyage à travers l'impossible* of 1903. Booth's film includes an interesting effort to match the crazed revolution of a train car (shot "live" by revolving a camera while photographing the panicked passengers) with a model set in which detached cars revolve one-by-one while ascending a ravine and reassembling on a mountain ledge track. The film ends with cars formed in a revolving circle, the composition matched to a round matte with the devil's laughing face inside.

Dreams

A very few films continue altogether to construct themselves in dream format, although the framing narrative varies. Fuzzing over the dream "entry" serves to becloud the main story body in useful ambiguity, better to enlist spectator interest. It appears in *Terrible Ted* (Biograph. MMA). Motivated by a Wild West dime novel, a boy steals a revolver from a parlor drawer and intimidates

police on a brownstone New York street. Inexplicably, the film cuts to a western stage holdup. In turn, Terrible Ted dispatches the bandits, shoots a cardsharp in a bar, saves an Indian girl from a bear, and is captured asleep by Indians. The girl rescues him from the stake, and while counting the scalps of braves he has stabbed, Terrible Ted wakes at home.

A Diabolo Nightmare (Urban. W.R. Booth, dir. LON) has a man entranced by the diabolo, a top-like object that is balanced, spun, thrown up and caught on a string manipulated with two hand-held sticks. The obsessed figure passes through increasingly nightmarish episodes, evocative first of Edwin S. Porter's *The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* (Edison 1906) with a fall from the sky through a ceiling into a home, then of Méliès. The diabolo player journeys underwater, where he tries to teach his game to a Neptune-costumed man. The film concludes in the dreamer's bed.

Farces

With or without trick interludes, various movies draw from one or another form of stage farce. Two thieves escape capture by hiding in cubbyholes of a bourgeois home including the bathtub: *La Douche d'eau boulliante* (attributed to Méliès but probably not. AFI/LOC). *Mr. Gay and Mrs.* (Biograph. MMA) is very like a nineties stereograph set. The husband flirts; his wife interrupts. In *Under the Old Apple Tree* (Biograph. MMA) tricks are played on suitors who seat themselves beneath the pranksters.

Yale Laundry (Biograph. MMA) describes the chaos that follows when parents leave their daughters in charge of the New Haven shop. *College Chums* (Edison. MMA) stems directly from a theater farce. A man impersonates his friend's "sister" in order to conciliate an angry fiancée. This film has a multi-image sequence in which lovers speak on the phone, their separate scenes matted against a cityscape, with printed words passing across the sky between. In *Monsieur et Madame veulent une bonne* (Pathé. Georges Hatot, dir. COP), the woman member of a thieves' trio gains employment in a bourgeois home. A confederate is smuggled in by trunk. Males of the household flirt with the woman and hide in the trunk to escape discovery. The film is set in Italy and its performing style veers radically from typical farce to grotesque *commedia dell'arte* gesture.

Other farces satirize more specific subject matter. *Dr. Skinum* (Biograph. MMA) comments on the vogue for cosmetic surgery. Legs are repaired, a nose bobbed. Weight is lost. Women are stretched and compressed. Here as in other occasional comic bits, a gag triggers memories of later film comedy. The fat woman shrunk to a baby is like the fat man caught in a steam box in W. C. Fields's *The Barbershop* (1933).

Chases

Chases are many, and they run in two directions: the miscreant pursued, the naïf escaping. *Le Mariage de Victorine (How Bridget's Lover Escaped)* (Méliès. AFI/LOC): a cook's boyfriend eludes pursuers angered at his effect on the dinner service. *Jack the Kisser* (Edison. MMA): outraged victims of an impulsive kisser finally capture him. An old maid and a black woman scuffle over who may kiss Jack tied to a tree.

Wife Wanted (Biograph. MMA): advertising for a mate, a man is pursued by applicants. The winner faints on sight of his many children. *Mind Your Own Business* (Warwick. Jack Smith, dir. LON): boys scrapping after a marble game precipitate combat between the mothers and fathers. The parents pursue the boys. (The film has a very clean match through a door from exterior to interior). *His Only Pair of Trousers* (Cricks and Martin, A. E. Coleby, dir. LON): a thief steals trousers from a clothesline. Their owner encases himself in a sheet of linoleum and prompts a mayhem of encounters as he rolls from place to place, finally bumping into this quarry.

Stage Struck (Edison. MMA): three country girls are lured into running from home by an itinerant performer. Pursued and finally captured by the parents, the girls' sliding escapes serve to expose skirted legs. *Cheval Emballé (The Runaway Horse* (Pathé. Ferdinand Zecca, dr. MMA): when a wheel falls from his cart, a horse bolts, causing a sequence of catastrophes until he returns to the stable. Cuts are consistently developed between the horse eating a bag of storefront oats and his owner, "meanwhile," distracted inside.

(The Police Dogs) Pathé. Possibly not 1907. (André Heuze, dir.(?) LON) casts animals in the role of pursuer, tracking down a gang of thieves. *Le Course des potirons (Pumpkins Race)* (Gaumont. Louis Feuillade and Romeo Bozzetti. MMA) is well known and no longer attributed to Emile Cohl.

The Motivated Link

For want of a better term, The Motivated Link intends to describe a kind of narrative organization in which separate episodes, characteristically filmed in different or purportedly different locations, have been joined through a single character who is distinguished by some particular motive, eccentricity or invention.

The Love Microbe (Biograph. MMA): a scientist discovers how to extract love microbes from affectionate couples by inconspicuously drawing specimens from the backs of their necks with a syringe. Reinjecting the microbes into fighting or alienated people in the same fashion (the potion can also be placed in beer!), he accomplishes comic results. "Seen" in a matted point-of-view microscope perspective, the microbes prove to be little, swarming heart-shaped elements.

Liquid Electricity (Vitagraph. LON): a scientist emulsifies electricity. Sprayed with an atomizer, it accelerates (through pixilation) lazy and somnolent subjects. In several instances the scientist himself appears at slowed-to-"normal" speed in frame with his high-speed subject. Since this movement was accomplished by decelerating one actor's movements while the other was paced ordinarily (along with tree leaves, shadows, etc.) the effect is particularly unsettling.

"The Energizer" (Biograph. MMA): through ingesting a new breakfast cereal, subjects are vitalized into highly energetic conditions. *Une Dame vraimont bien!* (Louis Feuillade. MMA): a pretty woman causes unintentional disasters as she is viewed by Parisian males. *(Short-Sightest Cyclist)* (Eclipse. LON): dispatched with a note, he runs from one obstacle to another, finally plunging into the Seine. *That Fatal Sneeze* (Hepworth. LON): a nephew puts quantities of sneezing powder on his uncle's clothing. Sneezing causes objects to fall, an earthquake, blows people away, and results finally in a chase. *Laughing Gas* (Edison. MMA): overdosed at the dentist, a black woman causes hilarity and generally fortuitous results from chance encounters on her journey home. *Deaf-Mutes' Masquerade (Deaf-Mutes' Ball)* (Biograph. MMA): returning drunk from a ball, a deaf-mute disguised in a bear costume causes consternation and is nearly committed to a zoo cage.

In *Hypnotist's Revenge* (Biograph. MMA) a stage mesmerist is stung by a wealthy young man's gibes. The hypnotist follows "Chappie" about, causing him to embrace women, swing from a chandelier at dinner, and try to replace the groom at a wedding. The youth is spared a final commitment to Bellevue when his tormentor relents. *A Suburbanite's Ingenious Alarm* (Edison. MMA): fearful of losing his job, a tardy commuter ties a rope to his leg, extending the loose end out his second story bedroom window so that a friend may wake him in the morning. A drunk secures the other end to a milk wagon. After being dragged through the streets, the employee finally limps to work, unbelievably early. *The Boy, the Bust and the Bath* (Vitagraph. LON) casts a young woman, her grotesque suitors and a boy in a boarding house. The boy places a bust bearing her likeness in a bath tab. The men suffer embarrassments peeking through the keyhole, but finally trap the boy and soak him. *The Rivals* (Edison. MMA) has two men plotting tricks on one another as they seek the same girl's hand. Both are finally outwitted by a third suitor.

Melodrama

Finally there is a series of films that draw on costumes, conventions and plot contrivances of theatrical melodrama. In *The Fraudulent Solicitor* (Hepworth. Lewin Fitzhamon, dir. GEH) a lawyer steals money. Discovered, he kills the client. After a rooftop fight, the murderer is captured. *Røverens Brud* (Nordisk. Viggo Larsen, dir. COP) portrays a police ambush and capture of an outlaw gang, the attempted rescue of the leader by his wife, first foiled, then successful, and finally the couple's death. The bandits' successful escape is eccentrically staged with two identical shots of a passing cart in which the outlaw has been imprisoned. First the wife leaps aboard, then they jump off together.

In *Lost in the Alps* (Edison. MMA) monks' Saint Bernards locate two lost children who appear to be buried in recent Central Park snow. *The Mill Girl* (Vitagraph. LON) has a working girl suffering sexual harassment from her supervisor. Defended by a mill hand, she later faints during a fire in the factory after enduring further advances. The young man saves her from the building; presumably the villain dies of smoke inhalation in the basement.

The Trainer's Daughter (Edison. MMA) is set at a racetrack. Timing the favored suitor's horse (motivated matte shot to stimulate binoculars), the villain bribes a stableboy to dope the animal, but he is overheard by the jockey, who switches horses in their stalls. Villain subdues jockey, who is yet able to warn the fiancée. She herself rides the horse to victory. The approaching race is preceded by a sound-motivated cutaway to the track bugler.

Falsely Accused! (Biograph. MMA) posits a spurned villain who steals plans from the inventor-father's safe. The father is found dead in his (movie) laboratory, his daughter imprisoned. Her boyfriend extracts film from a laboratory camera, learns to process it, and projects images of the actual murder in a courtroom scene. This last sequence is visible in the Museum nitrate print, first with spectators staring at a blank sheet mounted behind the bench, then with the yet-to-be-matted-in murder footage positioned to accommodate the preceding image. [Griffith can be identified in the courtroom. His appearance, dating from December, precedes *Rescued From an Eagle's Nest*, which was filmed at Edison the next month. Griffith appears also in *Professional Jealousy* (Biograph. December, 1907. MMA)]. Another point of interest in *Falsely Accused!* is the skillful cut-in of film being developed in a darkroom tray. Vindicating evidence secured through photography dates back to Dion Boucicault, *The Octoroom* (1859).

Jalousie et folie (Pathé. Date uncertain. MMA) has the feel of a reenactment, like *The Unwritten Law*, but *mélodrame* itself often derived from lurid news accounts and court records. Finding his wife with her lover, a rural husband loses his sanity. The pair commit him to an asylum; he escapes from the exercise yard. Finding the two together again, the husband strangles his wife and dies in an exchange of rifle fire with the police.

With slight rationalizations, some dozen additional titles might be shoehorned into one of the above pigeon holes, but these would have little further effect on our inquiry. What shapes do 1907 films take?

The choice of material and its design bear some relation to duration. If an idiom continues early modes (dreams, magic) it tends to be medium length; in the case of trickery, also to unity of time and location. Alternatively, dreams and magic may be accommodated in other generic forms, so that the dream balloon figures as a segment of *The Boaster* (Hepworth. Lewis Fitzhamon, dir. GEH) and *The Unwritten Law*. Similarly, *"Teddy" Bears* contains one sequence in which Goldilocks peers through a keyhole and views a primitive, charming moment of puppet animation. A chorus line of little seated teddy bears performs. *La Course des potirons* uses reverse motion to animate its pumpkins for the purposes of a chase. *The Water Babies* smoothly shifts from naturalistic exposition to special effects as the chimney sweep descends to an underwater world of Victorian illustration. A bowling ball in *If You Had a Wife Like This* (Biograph. MMA) mysteriously circles each pin, spilling none.

Stage farce, like stage comics, also dates to earliest days. Its character progresses from the simplest of forms (*Vesta Tilley* [Biograph, MMA] merely shows a female impersonator changing costume) to the complications of *College Chums*. Most farces confine themselves to single-set sequences, sometimes with one or another form of split staging or onstage doors for additional paths of entrance and exit. *Cohen's Fire Sale* (Edison. MMA) boasts an especially "authentic" theatrical flat, seeming to continue the perspective of a Hester Street storefront vista. In fact, the mixtures of stylized artifice and the natural curiously characterize 1907 decor, not only shifting modes, as in *When the Devil Drives*, but situating both in a single shot. *The Hooligans of the West* has cavalry fording a real stream that is incongruously laid with large, artificial rocks.

Adaptations, if infrequent, contribute stable, developed narrative skeletons. Interestingly, *The Water Babies* and *Francesca di Rimini* provide some of the most advanced exposition, but their evidence is too minimal for generalizations. Reen-

actments, in their own way, share qualities with adaptation. Each tends to fall into the dramatic strategies of sensational theater in which "key" scenes are linked to create a succession of arresting highlights, like the vignetted illustrations of four-sheet advertising posters. In one respect, adaptations and reenactments share a common advantage, for they draw on audience foreknowledge and thus avoid falling back on popular conventions to depict motives and value-conflict.

By 1907 chases have developed complicated initial business to trigger the pursuits *(Wife Wanted, Stage Struck)* and often integrate the chase with other genres, particularly camera tricks *(His Only Pair of Trousers)*. Such combinations themselves date at least as early as *Maniac Chase* (Edison, 1904). Chases, too, are staged with increasing design. In *Wife Wanted*, the pursued man successively hides in a yard of culvert pipes and a field of haystacks. *(The Police Dogs)* has one skittish canine who predictably fails to surmount a cliff, to jump a fence, to ford a lake; we may conjecture significance in Pathé's choice to leave this footage at the tail of each shot. Perhaps, too, the conjunction of escape and pursuit provided a formal basis on which rescue films might shortly establish themselves through the introduction of increasingly sophisticated editing.

Like chases, the motivated link provides a form where separate incidents, sometimes almost autonomous, may be joined both to manufacture an entertainment of sufficient length and to heighten effects so that the film overall carries something of a crescendo effect. Indeed, both chase and motivated link comedies easily support propositions made by Henri Bergson in *Laughter*, which first appeared in 1908. Bergson itemized the Jack-in-the-box effect (one stubborn force counteracted by another), the Dancing-jack (a character who is the unknowing pawn of another), and the Snowball (insignificant cause finally culminating in a major consequence). As elsewhere, chases sometimes evoke situations clearly akin to later films. *Wife Wanted* is very like Keaton's *Seven Chances* (1925), just as the devil's escape through an illusory fireplace in *Satan en prison* (Méliès. AFI/LOC) reminds us of Buster's dive through a window in *Sherlock Jr.* (1924).

Melodrama poses the most direct questions with respect to length and plot. In some cases the films are melodrama segments, not condensations like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Edison, 1903) which mirrors the truncated 10-20-30 stage entertainment of the nineties, but excerpts of broader schemes. Many suggest one act of a three-act play: crime and apprehension *(The Fraudulent Solicitor. The Robber's Wife (Røverens Brud)* or peril and rescue *(Lost in the Alps)*. Others, such as *The Mill Girl. The Trainer's Daughter* and *Falsely Accused!* describe more typically conventional evolutions of plot conventions, but we have too little time clearly to explicate the relationships. *The Trainer's Daughter* gives a cloudy picture of actual attitudes shared among father, daughter, boyfriend, jockey and villain. *The Mill Girl* is somewhat more fully plotted, although its resolutions are hardly tidy. *Falsely Accused!* suggests like relationships between father, daughter, boyfriend and villain, although we have little understanding why the boyfriend takes film from the movie camera and processes it, and the courtroom denouement is peremptory.[4] A more intensive investigation of narrative form in the evolution of movie melodrama might test the premise that melodrama, in contrast to other idioms, supplied a kind of story closure which encouraged further developments in film exposition: more complicated sets of character interrelationships, and episodes designed to supply other aspects of discourse than plot furtherance, character delineation, for instance.

Watching 1907 over a week's time (how clean the New York streets, how bright the buildings!) may strike a viewer with constant reminders of dime novel graphics (explicit in *Terrible Ted*) or period comics and caricature. One reason for this must be the conditions of cramped framing that often accompany studio setups involving confrontations. The end of *Røverens Brud*, for example, stages a military attack through an outlaw cabin window with such intimacy that each person's firearm is unbelievably point blank: a suicidal shoot-out. Filmed in exterior, the last scene of *Jalousie et folie* is quite similar.

Another excuse to point up film/comic likenesses is the commonality of length. A full-page Sunday strip, with its nine-to-twelve panels, tells a story with scope equatable to a half-reel: potentially

similar numbers of characters, of incidents and locations.

Finally, comics, stage and early movies all enjoy a common pool of gesturing and posturing conventions. An example may be drawn from *If You Had a Wife Like This*, a *Bringing Up Father* kind of story. Forced by his shrewish wife to wash the floor, Peck leaves a note (insert): "Gone to the drug store for some headache powder. Will be back soon. Peck." Henceforth he scurries through a series of diversions: poker game, bowling alley, attendance at a music hall Salome dance. Each time, the wife discovers Peck, who narrowly escapes her clutches. In the last scene, she ties him to a chair and forces Peck to watch *her* perform the Dance of the Seven Veils. (Richard Strauss's opera prompted a scandal at the Met early that year).

Because of the motivated link design, Peck must elude his wife within the confines of a Medium Long Shot at the conclusion of each episode. Such business requires running-in-place frenzy, that is, the actors have to appear to be anxiously pursued and pursuing without escaping the movie camera's purview. Such gesture can be likened to a stage farce where actors must seem to move at greater speed than circumstances allow. Or to a comic strip panel depicting running with a static image.

Well accustomed to chase films, most often executed with diagonal movements and deep perspectives, the viewer easily distinguishes natural states of running from studio contrivances. What fascinates, as with unacknowledged conventions from any period, is the absence of contradiction between the two forms. Stage pursuits are equally acceptable, just as the artificial rocks in *The Hooligans of the West* fail to clash with their location setting.

By this token, films of 1907 trace an entire litany of conventionalized gesture and costume, more often than not deriving from gothic, then domestic, theatrical melodrama with its spilloffs into popular graphics. There is the stage drunk in *The Deaf-Mutes' Masquerade*, bottle upended to tilted head. There is the hand-clasped motion of feminine despair *(The Unwritten Law)*, and the mimed confidence between hero and heroine in full view of other parties *(The Trainer's Daughter)*. There is the slapping flirtation of a female impersonator with a prurient male *(College Chums)* that could as well be Jack Lemmon in *Some Like It Hot*. The young boy thrusts his chest in imitation of western bravado in *Terrible Ted*. Battling husbands in *Neighbors* (Biograph, MMA) reconcile and strut, arms around shoulders, inside to drink, looking for all the world like Jiggs, Happy Hooligan, or Flip out of *Little Nemo in Slumberland*. It is an endless list.

One possible use of gesture-coding[5] in such films rests in its correlation to plot function, *function* in the broad sense of Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*:[6] a character is what he does or (the equation is reversible) does what he is. For example, one function that figures surprisingly often in early films is the mischievous boy. Because he plays tricks, the mischievous boy regularly serves as an agent to actuate tumbles, practical jokes and other irritations sufficient to cause chases (like *Max and Moritz*, *Buster Brown*, *The Yellow Kid*, *the Captain and the Kids*, and *Little Jimmy* in period comics). He dates at least as early as Tom Taylor's *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* (1863).

In *The Boy, The Bust and the Bath*, the mischievous boy watches a nearsighted, bandy-legged suitor try to peek through a bathroom door keyhole. The boy clasps his stomach with both hands and bends over in apparent spasms of mirth before jabbing his dupe with a pin. In *The Suitors*, one man views his rival asleep on a park bench, and then places an infant in the sleeper's outstretched hands. He repeats the gesture of the boy in the bathroom hallway; he is serving the function of mischievous boy. In *Yale Laundry*, a group of college boys (identical white sweaters with "Y's" on the chest) play mischievous boy by disclosing a flirtation conducted behind a folding screen. The tramp who steals trousers in *His Only Pair of Trousers* is a mischievous boy, like the sailor in *Under the Old Apple Tree* who drops apples on unwary suitors below, the nephew who puts sneeze powder in his uncle's clothes *(That Fatal Sneeze)*, the drunk who ties the rope to the milk wagon in *The Suburbanite's Ingenious Solution*.

Moving gingerly now between the primitive and something approaching moderate stylistic consciousness, many films of 1907 carry obvious and intentional overtones of fantasy, not limited to special effects or *art nouveau* decor. The strangest

of appearances can result from merely converting a French product *(Le Mariage de Victorine)* to foreign soil *(How Briget's Lover Escaped.* In *A Seaside Girl* (Hepworth. LON) a young woman has sought every means to escape the attentions of three smitten men, finally taking a bath cabin into the water and going for a swim, only to find that two of the suitors have seated themselves at the cabin door so that she cannot reenter without harassment. At this point, the third swain, a Scotsman in kilts, wades to her side. They embrace, and he carries her ashore. The sight of a kilted, fully dressed man standing waist-deep in water while embracing a girl in bathing costume all the time watched by two seated males in full dress crouched on a waterbound cabin is bizarre. It hints at the appeal of early movies, some at least, to writers and artists, soon to be dadists and surrealists. Like the hypnotized Chappie swinging from a restaurant dinner party chandelier. Or the inventor of liquid electricity moving in exaggeratedly slow grace while his subjects scurry through their accelerated work schedules and tree leaves flutter wildly. In last analysis, 1907 almost seems to project undated, manic visions of a world we still inhabit.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Noël Burch, "Porter or Ambivalence," *Screen*, v. 19 n. 4 (Winter 1978/79); John Fell, *A History of Films*. New York. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979, Ch. 2, "The Evolution of Narrative;" André Gaudreault, "Detours in Film Narrative: The Development of Cross-Cutting," *Cinema Journal*, v. 19 n. 1 (Fall 1979); Charles Musser, "The Early Cinema of Edwin Porter," *Cinema Journal*, v. 19 n. 1 (Fall 1979); Barry Salt, "Film Form 1900-1906," *Sight and Sound* (Summer 1978); Martin Sopocy, "A Narrated Cinema: The Pioneer Story Films of James A. Williamson," *Cinema Journal*, v. 18 n. 1 (Fall 1978); and the special issue of *Cahiers de la Cinémathèque* (Jan.-Feb. 1980) devoted to the subject.

2. This article stems from a research project pursued January 2-4, 1980 through the agency of the Film Department, Museum of Modern Art, New York City. Staged, i.e. "fiction," films dating from 1907 were studied by a collection of interested parties, with supporting information supplied by Eileen Bowser, who coordinated the undertaking. I am also indebted to Professor Daniel C. Gerould of the CUNY Graduate Center for additional references and insights.

Sources of films cited are included with other relevant information at their first text appearance. The Museum of Modern Art (MMA), the Library of Congress (LOC), Archives of the American Film Institute (AFI), George Eastman House (GEH), the National Film Archive (LON), Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique (BRU), Det Danske Filmmuseum (COP), and Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek (DK) are gratefully acknowledged for making this material available to study.

Opportunity for such close examination of early film originated in Fall 1977 when relevant material from the Library of Congress, the Museum of Modern Art, the National Film Archive of Great Britain and Eastman House was made available for study in preparation for a Spring Conference of the International Federation of Film Archives. Papers resulting from this meeting and from a parallel study group in Europe appear in the *Cahiers de la Cinémathèque* issue cited above.

3. Alternate titles or titles deriving from other than a country of origin are enclosed in parentheses.

4. Shots are missing from both these Museum of Modern Art Titles.

5. A discussion of visual signals employed in theatrical melodrama will be found in Gilbert B. Cross, *Next Week—East Lynne: Domestic Drama in Performance 1820-1874*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1977. Pp. 106-141.

6. Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968, 2nd ed.

CORRECTION

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1. See, for example, Noël Burch, "Porter or Ambivalence," *Screen*, v. 19 n. 4 (Winter 1978/79); John Fell, *A History of Films*. New York. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979, Ch. 2, "The Evolution of Narrative;" André Gaudreault, "Detours in Film Narrative: The Development of Cross-Cutting," *Cinema Journal*, v. 19 n. 1 (Fall 1979); Charles Musser, "The Early Cinema of Edwin Porter," *Cinema Journal*, v. 19 n. 1 (Fall 1979); Barry Salt, "Film Form 1900-1906," *Sight and Sound* (Summer 1978); Martin Sopocy, "A Narrated Cinema: The Pioneer Story Films of James A. Williamson," *Cinema Journal*, v. 18 n. 1 (Fall 1978); and the special issue of *Cahiers de la Cinémathèque* (Jan.-Feb. 1980) devoted to the subject.

2. This article stems from a research project pursued January 2-4, 1980 through the agency of the Film Department, Museum of Modern Art, New York City. Staged, i.e. "fiction," films dating from 1907 were studied by a collection of interested parties, with supporting information supplied by Eileen Bowser, who coordinated the undertaking. I am also indebted to Professor Daniel C. Gerould of the CUNY Graduate Center for additional references and insights.

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Reviews

THE ELECTRIC HORSEMAN

Director: Sydney Pollack. Producer: Ray Stark. Editor: Sheldon Kahn. Screenplay: Robert Garland from screen story by Garland and Paul Gaer, based on a story by Shelly Burton. Photography: Owen Roizman. Music: Dave Gusin. Columbia.

The Electric Horseman borders on being an American classic, were it not so simple and slick at the same time. Meet of *Equus* and *Network*, it revitalizes the myth of the American cowboy and takes potshots at the media. It deals in passion and lets all the main characters (man, woman, horse) come out clean, fulfilled, free again. It's a fairy-tale ending to a hard-nosed critique of big business and how it has coopted the dream, the frontier, the souls of people.

But it's a flawed film, unabashedly sentimental in the sincerity brought to the project by Robert Redford and director Sydney Pollack, neighbors in Utah, who have shared their backyard with America as the alternative to neon lights and hypocrisy, Las Vegas and technology. Yet it's a really provocative film in the way that Jane Fonda plays her Hallie Martin role slightly against the grain, skateboarding her way between the epiphany moment and the ridiculous melodrama. The energy is Redford's and Pollack's. The passion touches briefly upon the couple but stays with the slow-motion on the horse. The insights are Fonda's.

The relationship between an actor's off-screen image and his fictional screen presence is problematic, perhaps insurmountably so in the case of Redford. I have never felt Robert Redford as "real" in a film. This film is as personal to him as *Jeremiah Johnson*, the last time he took us to Utah and Rousseau's natural savage. Redford is to be thanked for *The Electric Horseman*, but not for his performance in it, a way of acting (more crucially, a way of being) that is too slick. He just isn't a cowboy. But then he's not much of anything else, either. He tries for "sincere," but he comes off as less than half of "genuine." Redford was perfect for a film like *The Candidate*, where his way of being in the world is compromised, where he's supposed to be a sincere politician caught in the hard chore of garnering votes without selling out, a pretty face with a quick cliché and no clue whatsoever as to what behavior is appropriate after victory.

Here, Redford and Pollack do much both to exaggerate that flaw in the hero and to alleviate it. The opening credits are among the most effective in any recent film I've seen. They approach Sonny Steele's past through the media, and so Redford isn't acting. He's caught in stills, in billboards, on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*, on the box of Ranch Breakfast. The transition from real rodeo hero to "electric horseman" and media mannequin is handled both naturally and effectively in those opening credits.

Pollack cuts for contrast across the close-up, a technical device that minimizes Redford's acting and turns bodies into ideas. Sonny Steele falls off his horse on a football field, completely drunk and passing out before he hits the ground. Close-up of him on the ground. Then traveling music, the theme song for the film, the country-western strains of "Mama, don't let yer babies grow up to be cowboys." Then close-up on yellow with a zoom out to show Sonny Steele on a yellow wooden rocking horse in a grocery store, a child on his lap.

When Redford is allowed to play out a scene, his cute comments come off as coarse, missing the point somehow, and he usually moves to or with the camera rather than integrating his character in the landscape; in a sense, he plays the flatness of the film frame, itself, rather than the potential interiority and symbolism of the "lost frontier." *The Electric Horseman* exaggerates where it needs to be tight and austere, in order to compensate for the "big bad wolf" typage of the corporation moguls and the police. Trapped at a roadblock, Sonny Steele leaves the steering wheel of his van and mounts Rising Star, his stolen thoroughbred, himself become "electric" with transquilizers and steroids, and Steele rides the horse in and around and away from hordes of blaring sirens and screeching police cars. The scene is played out well beyond its effectiveness. At one point a police car overturns on another and both continue the chase, one right side up, the other upside down, reminiscent of *Sugarland Express*, when something as tight-lipped as the chase scene in *Bullitt* was really needed to keep the tension from dissolving into "Roadrunner" cartoon farce.

Pollack compensates in part for such saccharine exaggerations with an interesting editing scheme relating to Hallie Martin and her investigative curiosity, her greed for the scoop. Valerie Perrine walks into the hotel and asks if Sonny Steele has checked in. Cut. We don't even know her as Charlotta Steele yet. We just know she's there, so that when she encounters Sonny and Hallie, respectively, she's a familiar face. These quick introductions, these fragments of scenes that are snipped before they give any information, are reminiscent of subliminal cuts familiar to advertising—imprinting something in the mind of the spectator without any lingering development. Hallie interviews Wendell, the cowboy friend of Sonny Steele. He says: "You'd have to know him a long time to understand." She says: "How long have you known him?" Cut before the answer, before any conclusion to the interview. Charlotta confronts her in front of the elevators. But there is a cut before we get the "gossip" about her love life with Sonny. There is eventually a pay-off to these ellipses when Hallie gradually reveals what she has gotten from these interviews to Steele, bit by bit in their desert trek to where the wild mustangs roam.

But such subtleties of cutting are confined to the film's handling of Hallie Martin and the complexities of investigative reporting. They belong finally to one character within the film rather than to the overall film. As such, they do not compensate for Steele's vaudeville, Redford playing for the cameras as though he were still the Sundance Kid, sledge-hammer exaggerations that dissipate the really serious things this film has to say about passion and compromise, Eastern media and hustling versus Western nostalgia and simplicity.

What saves *The Electric Horseman* and makes it worth more than a cursory look is Jane Fonda and her cumulative persona as TV investigative reporter. Fonda has paid her dues with the likes of *Barefoot in the Park* (her first film with Redford) and *Barbarella*—a lot of dumb roles in vapid films in order to do the really fine roles she's been getting of late. She carries a sense of maturity and saving irony, someone both jaded and ultimately honest, in these roles as reporter. She began as Susan in Godard's *Tout va bien*—the reporter who does American news in France, someone who gets the real political scoops of a factory strike and a supermarket exposé but can't get them delivered uncut on the air. She is by her own admission "a foreign correspondent who corresponds to nothing."

Robert Redford as Sonny Steele the commercialized cowboy in THE ELECTRIC HORSEMAN.

Godard's film was the rehearsal, the testing ground for Fonda filling out this kind of role in films. It comes to fruition with *The China Syndrome* and *The Electric Horseman*. In *The China Syndrome* she plays a young reporter who is eager to do the "real" news but who is stuck with the quirk news, the eccentric shorts and "happy news" that serve as filler between serious segments handled by men. She stumbles onto the impending melt-down of the nuclear reactor in that film. She doesn't seek it out. She finds her scoop by sheer coincidence and physical presence. In *Electric Horseman* she is already established as a news reporter. She is there to report the imminent merger of AMPCO Corporation with Omni-Bank, but she has an eye for the human interest story which leads her to pursue Sonny Steele, to pester him and pursue him, for the sake of the story, not the man. Clearly, she will do anything to get her story. She tries to set up Rising Star's return to nature as a media happening, and Sonny counters with a different locale, having guessed her intentions. One of the major components of the trust that builds between Sonny and Hallie is an allowance for what otherwise would be "betrayal" but in their case is a being true to their separate selves. And if Fonda's character in *Tout va bien* is content

with a dead-end of her past and the abstract necessity to "rethink herself historically," there is real geometric growth of leaps and bounds in her character in both *The China Syndrome* and *The Electric Horseman.* In both films she ends up with the scoop she sought, but she transforms the uninterpreted facts of the story into a personal confession, a way of feeling the news. She manages in both films to observe and participate, both, and then to report, reflecting both the observations and the participation. In *The China Syndrome* she persists with her questioning, because she realizes that the cover-up for Jack Lemmon's act is to proclaim him insane in the news. She goes back on the air a final time and cries, apologizes for her lack of objectivity and "comes clean" for the cameras. She does much the same thing in *The Electric Horseman.* She falls in love with Sonny Steele, she comes up against her own guarded emotions against men, her own need to control herself and her emotions, her own city-slicker sophistication and prejudice about cowboys and the Old West. She is rewarded for her scoop. The network will send her to cover the Paris elections. Networks reward news-getters. But she carries it a step further as a kind of continued communication with the cowboy. Rising Star is roaming free in Utah, Sonny Steele is hitchhiking into anonymity and she is adding a postscript to her report, a personalized thank-you in close-up to her subject.

The whole idea seems a bit corny at first glance. Is this the new woman emerging as anchor-person and adding women's supposedly typical emotional outpouring to mens' supposedly analytical and formal presentation of the news? Is this confessional style the antidote to happy news? I think both questions are real ones, but they miss the point of Fonda's presentations. It makes little sense to rejoice just with the cowboy, shedding his electric buttons and going back to the familiar wandering of the Western hero. What has more impact for me is that Hallie Martin goes back to New York with the same joy he has in Utah. She carries that joy transplanted and turns it into news. Her character poses the interesting proposition that perhaps such an investigative reporter, that bit of TV within the overall film, is the "savior," transforming the technology that endangers us into something new that works for us. Clearly, in both *The China Syndrome* and *The Electric Horseman,* the media are equated with the villains. The camera comes under the same scrutiny as the nuclear industry in *The China Syndrome* and the AMPCO Corporation in *The Electric Horseman.* Both films assume a kind of post-Watergate mistrust of the media, but Fonda's collage-reporter turns the hustling and unscrupulous networks into the born-again Fifth Estate. —WILLIAM F. VAN WERT

THE MARRIAGE OF MARIA BRAUN

(Die Ehe der Maria Braun) Director: Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Producer: Martin Fengler. Screenplay: Peter Marthesheimer and Pea Frohlich. Editor: Juliane Lorenz. Photography: Michael Ballhaus. Albatros Film; New Yorker Films.

"After seeing Douglas Sirk's films, I am more convinced than ever that love is the best, most insidious, most effective instrument of social repression," Rainer Werner Fassbinder once said. Only a romanticist like Sirk, the unduly maligned master of melodrama, could make films depicting a simple thing like love as so twisted and insidious that the "happy ending" turns into a nightmare. And only someone like Fassbinder, a man who solemnly proclaimed a film with an all-woman cast "strictly autobiographical" could make *The Marriage of Maria Braun.*

It is Germany, in the middle of World War II. A woman, Maria, is married to Hermann Braun, a soldier who is immediately shipped to the front. We next see Maria waiting anxiously at the railroad station with other war wives, all of them carrying signs on their backs that describe their lost husbands. The mood is confusion: the camera pans from a frontal shot of Maria framed by a wooden fence, revolves around an impassive soldier's face, and winds up behind Maria, still against the fence. She gives up finally, and tosses her husband's placard under the wheels of a train. (An allusion to Brecht's sympathy for those "trapped beneath the wheels"? Or a metaphor of the inevitable destructiveness of capitalism?) But Hermann returns, after the war, and finds Maria with another man. A confused Maria accidentally kills the lover. Hermann takes the blame at the trial. The next time he and Maria see each other, he is behind bars.

Fassbinder has set his stage. For the rest of the film, Maria builds her life around her love for

with a dead-end of her past and the abstract necessity to "rethink herself historically," there is real geometric growth of leaps and bounds in her character in both *The China Syndrome* and *The Electric Horseman.* In both films she ends up with the scoop she sought, but she transforms the uninterpreted facts of the story into a personal confession, a way of feeling the news. She manages in both films to observe and participate, both, and then to report, reflecting both the observations and the participation. In *The China Syndrome* she persists with her questioning, because she realizes that the cover-up for Jack Lemmon's act is to proclaim him insane in the news. She goes back on the air a final time and cries, apologizes for her lack of objectivity and "comes clean" for the cameras. She does much the same thing in *The Electric Horseman.* She falls in love with Sonny Steele, she comes up against her own guarded emotions against men, her own need to control herself and her emotions, her own city-slicker sophistication and prejudice about cowboys and the Old West. She is rewarded for her scoop. The network will send her to cover the Paris elections. Networks reward news-getters. But she carries it a step further as a kind of continued communication with the cowboy. Rising Star is roaming free in Utah, Sonny Steele is hitchhiking into anonymity and she is adding a postscript to her report, a personalized thank-you in close-up to her subject.

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Fassbinder has set his stage. For the rest of the film, Maria builds her life around her love for

Hermann, in spite of their separation. Regardless of whether or not her love is "real," it is the passion that sustains her. It is also the carrot that Fassbinder dangles before Maria as he enmeshes her in a web of complications. As the reality of a reunion with her husband is repeatedly denied, Maria's love becomes an abstraction that retreats further and further into fantasy.

After Hermann is in jail, Maria, a little tougher, more cynical, lands a job with a businessman by following a simple economic truism: maximize the return on your assets. She sweet-talks a train conductor into letting her ride in the first-class car, puts on the black, low-cut dress that got her the barmaid's job, then sits down across from the businessman, Oswald, the only other person in the car. He notices the fine shape of her legs. He also notices the way she tells off a drunken American soldier who walks in and propositions her; Maria has had experience with Americans and their language before. Oswald, who does not speak English, is stunned and seduced by this display. He offers Maria a job as a "personal advisor" and interpreter for his business, and although she bargains with her beauty, Maria proves to be a valuable addition to Oswald's company. Inspired by and armed with the security of her noble love, Maria exudes a confidence that is overwhelming. She is shrewd and instinctive, and soon becomes an efficient businesswoman who earns the begrudging respect of men. And while she does have an affair with Oswald, Maria keeps business and pleasure strictly separate. "You're not having the affair with me; I'm having one with you," she tells him.

Control is the key to Maria. She is always completely in command. But she can't have the one thing she wants more than anything else—her man. We saw the same perverse irony in *Bitter Tears*, when the cold-blooded Petra fell in love with a woman who discards her, casually, the way Petra abandoned lovers who fell for her. Petra, now knowing the pain of rejection, becomes histrionic; holding a bottle of whiskey to her breast, she rolls about on her white rug and sobs that she can't bear living without that woman. Petra's notion of love is just the need for an object, but again, it is as "real" for her as any other notion. And we saw the same poignant sadness in *Fox and His Friends*, when Fassbinder played the part of a

Hanna Schygulla in THE MARRIAGE OF MARIA BRAUN

working-class gay who squandered his lottery winnings in a desperate gamble for acceptance by his bourgeois lovers. Fox finances their self-indulgent whims, but receives only ridicule in return. Even death does not spare Fox from humiliation: a gay couple see Fox's corpse being rifled, recognize him as their former fall guy, then walk away, quickly, not wanting to get involved. We felt a heart-rending sympathy for Fox, as we do for Maria; she too has an ideal love that eludes her, always lying just out of reach, waiting to be realized. She is only believing in, and following, the rituals of her culture. And in the surrounding confusion, she clings even tighter. At one point in the film, we see Maria and her sister at home, alone in an upstairs bedroom. They have put on fancy gowns and make-up. The soft candlelight accentuates their beauty, but they bemoan the lack of a man to appreciate it. There is only a bureau mirror. They gaze at their images, then look down on the dresser top, on which a framed photograph and other symbols of a man lie. At another point in the film, we see the two sisters in the rubble of a bombed building, their childhood school. They are laughing, and singing songs about men and true love, but as the camera recedes, the wrecked building dwarfs them, and sounds of ongoing construction become pointedly louder, mixing with the machinegun fire that opened the film.

The forces at work against Maria are not all as impersonal as Adam Smith's "invisible hand," however. Oswald falls desperately in love with Maria, and comes up with a plan to keep her with him that his bookkeeper rightly calls "the product of a sick mind." He is advancing in years, somewhere between middle and old age, but slowly dying from dissipation (whenever we see him, there

are usually bottles of booze or wine glasses somewhere in the frame). He knows Maria is married, but that is all. Early in the film, he secretly follows her when she goes to visit Hermann in prison. Then he visits Hermann, ostensibly to "meet the man Maria loves." But he has an ulterior motive—to buy Hermann off. We do not know of this deal until the film's end: Oswald has died, and when the will is read, Hermann is the surprise benefactor of half of Oswald's factory—the implicit stipulation being that Hermann had to stay out of Germany until Oswald's death.

Poor Maria does not know of these arrangements, either. She works long and hard hours at Oswald's business to make money for Hermann's eventual release. But the sacrifice is a small one, at least in light of her sublime love for Hermann. And that is why she is puzzled when she visits him in prison; he seems cold and removed, and refuses to take any money she offers. Maria despairs as her lawyer gets nowhere with his efforts to obtain Hermann's release. Then, suddenly, Hermann is freed. When Maria arrives to pick him up, however, he is already gone; there is only a note and a rose for her. Misty-eyed, she holds the rose, her long-stemmed perfect love, to her cheek, then snaps to, giving the rose to a guard as she leaves (Fassbinder also used flowers in *Fox* to symbolize an ideal bourgeois love).

Maria's reunion with Hermann is the final betrayal to the illusory paradigm of love to which she has martyred herself. Coincidentally, he comes back the day Oswald's will is to be read, and while Maria runs around radiating love, he is cold. He barely speaks to her, and would rather listen to a soccer match on the radio than talk or make love. Maria is dazed; she looks up at Hermann from the bed and he is upside down in the frame. An unthinkable reality is confronting the one she had lived by. Unnerved, she lights a cigarette from the gas stove and then blows out the flame, instead of turning off the burner, as we have seen her do before. She answers the door in her underwear; it is the bookkeeper with Oswald's will. She puts on a white dress for the reading. The revelation of Hermann's deal with Oswald is a shock that is too much; when the bookkeeper leaves, Hermann impassively tells Maria that he is giving all the money to her, but she bitterly replies: "I gave you everything—my whole life." In a cathartic trance, she walks into the kitchen to light another cigarette and boom—an accidental explosion kills them both.

We are as stunned as Maria by these developments. The events leading up to the reading of the will have not been very important. Fassbinder lulls us to sleep with the banalities of bourgeois life. Oswald and Maria eat in an empty restaurant. We see Oswald at home, drunk and slumped over a table. Then after Oswald's death, we see Maria eating in the same restaurant, alone, and at home, drunk, in the same pose as Oswald. Everything is quiet, and the camera barely moves. Even Hermann's return does not break the lethargy; Maria goes through the clichés of a couple on their honeymoon, and Hermann spouts those of a man long married. Matching this game is the droning sound of the soccer on the radio. But we notice, vaguely, that something is happening after all; there is a strange edge (or lack of it) to their emotions, and the camera begins to move around more. Then, in a continuing parallel to real time, all sorts of Chekhovian guns are fired in the space of a few minutes, and we're left wondering what in the world just happened. "Germany has just won the world soccer championship," the excited radio announcer answers in the explosion's aftermath.

Maria Braun is another one of Fassbinder's unrelenting schematics. There is still another protagonist burdened with, and bewildered by, a life whose day-to-day routines demand submission but make little sense. Fassbinder portrays victims. His characters may be vivacious in the beginning, but at the film's end they are enervated, passive, often dead. The transformation may be gradual, as in *Fox*, or abrupt; we watch Herr R., the proverbial ordinary worker, sit catatonically in front of a television set, then suddenly stand up, kill his companions, and hang himself (*Why Does Herr R. Run Amok?*). Sometimes the change is deliberate: the fruit peddler in *The Merchant of Four Seasons*, after being coerced and humiliated into conventionality, decides to end the disgust he feels over his success by sitting down and drinking himself to death, shot by shot. And the despair *Effi Briest* feels after having to give up the lover who sparked her drab life slowly drains her rebellious passion; death is her last way of defying an unforgiving, virtuous husband.

Maria does not choose to die. She does, how-

ever, choose to follow the rituals of duty, devotion and sacrifice that cause her repression and downfall. Why? Because her man, her key to happiness awaits her at the end of the path. It's a story line straight out of the forties, from Hollywood's "women's films." Fassbinder is knowingly trading on old clichés, and it's a risky venture that sometimes falters. But the film is held together and balanced by the amazing energy Hanna Schygulla exudes as Maria. She provides the spontaneity, the unexpected element that Fassbinder's pensiveness needs at times (by no coincidence, Schygulla is in Fassbinder's best films). Maria is a challenging role, and Schygulla successfully makes her both an all-encompassing stereotype and a distinct original. Her Maria is tough and arrogant. When she stands, her feet are spread wide apart, like a man's. When she speaks, she doesn't mince words. We always believe that she can do or have anything she wants. Yet, although certain parts of her hit home, we don't really identify with her. Fassbinder's typically cool and distant camera has a different angle; we identify with the exuberant Maria's determined will, and the fantasy of her success, but we also have the time and distance to develop our own perceptions about Maria. She is a tragic figure, and like the stoic heroines of earlier films, one that refuses to give in to self-pity. Fassbinder doesn't want us to give in to self-pity either, or to accept the tragic situation on the screen as our own fate, the way the weepies would have it. In his own sly way, Fassbinder takes the women's film and stands it on its head.

Much of *Maria Braun* is familiar melodrama: there is the theme of unrequited love; the woman who gives her all for love; the slow ebbing away of her self that results; the baby, prophetically stillborn; the schemers and heart-breaking complications; and the final, tragic nobility of the heroine's emotions. But in *Maria Braun*, the sex roles and accompanying expectations are chaotic; sometimes they confirm our anticipations, other times deny them. By succeeding in business and becoming more desirable to men, Maria goes a step further than we are used to. The bookkeeper, Oswald's loyal righthand man, is an effeminate who sobs hysterically at the news of Oswald's death; Maria, the lover, barely responds. Hermann is the woman whom the man tries to impress with success, and he is also the man whose self is threatened by a woman's achievements. And then we have Oswald, whose role is a reversal of the traditional "scheming woman." He is insidious, but also evokes our sympathy. When Maria doesn't return his love, he tries to buy it. The price Oswald pays, though, is Maria's increasing coldness, a growing cynicism that contemptuously mocks his clinging to her.

This intricate blend of characters and their emotions creates, like most melodrama, a self-contained mini-world, complete with a moral viewpoint that we are urged to accept as basically correct. But for Fassbinder, this process has an added dimension—a conflict with other beliefs and preconceptions, about what is "male" and "female," and their relative merits. The tragedy he presents is Maria's loss of "femaleness"—sympathy, intuition, empathy, nurturant qualities—and its replacement by "maleness"—a tough, cynical competiveness that leads to self-destruction. Femaleness usually has a negative connotation but, as Mary Daly has said, only because our patriarchal system uses the term pejoratively. As a film director, Fassbinder usurps this power to name and define things. In his reworked story of a woman trying to make it in a man's world, the tragedy has nothing to do with any predestined failure, and everything to do with the woman's success.

As Adrienne Rich and other feminists have pointed out, a woman's success often depends on a series of denials, a separation of herself from other women until she is "not like them." In the film's beginning, Maria can cry with her mother and sister, and later when she talks with her sister of their troubles. But near the end, Maria is beyond tears: she ruthlessly berates her secretary (a woman), then laughs at her when she breaks into tears. It's a hollow laugh, however; Maria's separation is from herself, too, from her own inner strength—the romantic ideals and intuitive imagination that were her earlier sustenance. She loses what has derogatorily been called a woman's "weak ego boundaries," the capacity for empathy. Her ego becomes "strong," like a man's—rigid and withdrawn, steadfastly refusing any challenge to its concepts. Her response to threats becomes a further entrenchment, and produces more cynicism and rigidness. When Hermann disappears after his release, we see Maria in her office, alone, working. "I have so many things to do," she says, punching out figures on her adding machine.

Things replace emotions. We see Maria in her new house; it's a large house, but she coldly tells her mother not to get any ideas about moving in. "It's a prison for you," her mother scolds, as we see Maria framed by the bars of a picture window.

Things, objects, are very important in the closed frames of Fassbinder's films. Like Sirk, Fassbinder surrounds his characters with symbols that become representative of his characters' ideas, their outlook on life. The time period and subject material of *Maria Braun* are also reminiscent of Sirk; Maria is the "rock" that Sirk would have thrown the tempests of a changing world against. And Sirk's influence can be seen in the camera angles and lighting. But Fassbinder wants to strip the techniques of their former contexts; he is only interested in the immediate response they produce. He wants to create his own "pessimistic melodrama." *Film noir* elements are thrown in, suddenly, evoking the desired emotional response without an excess baggage of intellectual associations. Oblique, sinister shadows often surround Oswald, reflecting a restless, unstable moodiness. Sidelighting is used as effectively in the prison scenes, also: when Maria visits, the light beckons from the outside, the bars of the gate casting gloomy, triangular shadows. Then the camera shifts, showing the view from the opposite end: Hermann sits against the wall, far away, and the large bulk of a guard looms ominously, filling the foreground and absentmindedly fingering his keys. Fassbinder's lighting is always mood-creating. The soft-focused mistiness of the scenes in the restaurant relaxes us; the luxuriant beauty is a retreat from the outside world, and we feel the mood of the diners. Similarly, the sterility of Maria's office is felt; the washed-out, filtered lightness is unnaturally bright.

And Fassbinder does not neglect sound. A doctor who certifies women as physically fit for prostitution sneaks behind a portable screen to shoot heroin after one examination, and as he does, a sudden burst of overly dramatic music startles us into sympathy. At another point, the soft, romantic playing of a piano on the sound track becomes the actual playing of Oswald as he tries to seduce Maria. The most pertinacious use of sound, however, is the recurrence of the machine-gun fire that opens the film. It creeps into other sounds, as when it blends with the clicking of Maria's adding machine, balefully becoming louder.

Ethics, not esthetics, is Fassbinder's goal in grabbing our emotions while they're off-guard. The intensity he creates is thought-provoking, not sentimental. The world outside the frame of the film is what interests Fassbinder; metaphorically, *Maria Braun* tells the story of postwar Germany: success at a price—a loss of emotions, a coldness now considered to be characteristic of Germans. The theme is familiar. Fassbinder is intensely dissatisfied with the "miracles" of modern capitalism. His characters are casualties of the economic rationalism that pervades our thinking; Fassbinder sees it as a rigged game that degrades people and drives them apart. But even if it were fair, it would not be worth playing, he says, for we spiritually prostitute ourselves in the pursuit of a private materialism. *Maria Braun* ends with the opening image of a poster of Hitler replaced by pictures of past German chancellors. They look strange because they're negatives, and when the present chancellor comes onto the screen, the image is whitened out, a trick Fassbinder used in *Effi Briest*. It's his way of waking up the audience, of jarring our intellects into asking why we have vague, curious feelings about what we just saw.

Art, when it is good, is a process of personal transformation; the artist puts down more than he or she consciously, or rationally, knows. And this is the power of Fassbinder's films; they speak to the subconscious. The disturbing criticism present in *Maria Braun* has an effect on us because it is implanted at a deep level. By playing with genre preconceptions, Fassbinder establishes a broadly based connection with the audience. We don't really need to know where his material came from or what he is alluding to for his conversation to work, either; the morals of the old melodramas are reflected in our culture. Much of the beauty of *Maria Braun* is Fassbinder's ability to use past film conventions without becoming bound or limited by them; he can still articulate personal concerns. Fassbinder himself has "weak ego boundaries." He rejects capitalism as incapacitating, and searches for a way to overcome the numbing incompleteness he sees. Through his art, he struggles toward wholeness. But the standards are still those of a society "not like him." Thus the situation of a woman trying to make it in a man's world is much like his own.

With *Maria Braun*, Fassbinder confronts us,

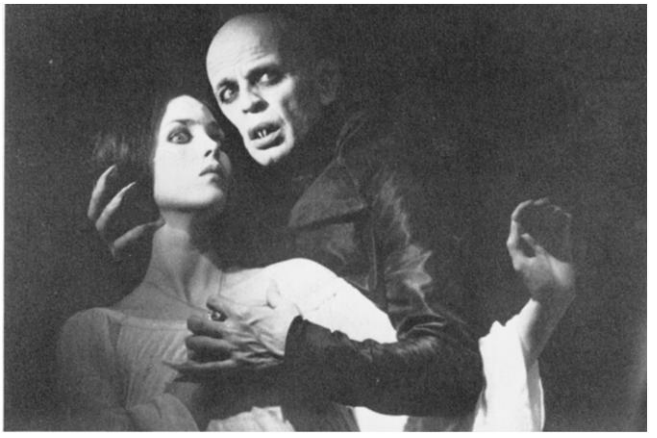
but in a subtle, relaxed way. His camera seems more comfortable with the idea of allowing our senses to be involved, entertained. That concession can only help Fassbinder thematically. In some of his past films an overbearing grimness would occasionally become too conscious a reminder that yes, we are alienated. Our lack of community confronts us daily. And while an escape into the fantasy of a perfect form in art would be the worst thing that could happen, we do need the respite that art can provide, the brief intimacy of an imaginative transformation of reality. Artists like Fassbinder continually challenge the way we look at things. He takes powerful and encompassing chunks of everyday life and carries on a dialogue that slowly grows, then dawns on you with a gasp, a quick catch of the breath. That Fassbinder works his art with "popular" forms can only be a further attestation to his acute perceptiveness and sensitivity.

—TOM NOONAN

NOSFERATU

Director: Werner Herzog. Script: Herzog. Photography: Jörg Schmidt-Reitwein. Twentieth Century-Fox.

Herzog considers *Nosferatu* Murnau's best film and Murnau Germany's greatest director; he has also been at pains, in recent interviews, to make it clear that his new film is not simply a remake. It is true that his *Nosferatu* follows the basic plot and includes some of the same dialogue and imagery found in Murnau's version, but a close viewing shows that no more than three shots are exactly the same in both films (allowing for the fact that Herzog's are in color). What he does perhaps twenty times is to duplicate Murnau's *mise en scène* but place the camera differently. For example, Murnau's fast-motion overhead shot of Dracula's loading his coffins on a cart and leaving the castle is here presented at normal speed and with the camera displaced approximately 90°. What Herzog does is to draw on Stoker's novel, Browning's and Murnau's films, the folk backgrounds of the vampire mythos, and even some recent articles on horror theory (he appears familiar, for instance, with Dillard's essay on the fear of the failure of death, "Even a Man Who is Pure at Heart: Poetry and Danger in the Horror Film," since he has Dracula virtually quote from it), to all of which he makes



NOSFERATU: *Isabelle Adjani and Klaus Kinski*

an original contribution. We know we are watching a Herzog film throughout, especially in the scenes of the frustrated bureaucrats who are unable to arrest Van Helsing properly because all the police and jail wardens are dead from the plague; of the citizens dining in the public square with a sea of white rats at their feet (followed by a cut to the same scene with rats covering the table and the people unaccountably vanished); of the gypsy boy sawing at a violin while Harker lies at his feet, dazed from a fall during his escape from Dracula's castle; of Lucy rejecting Van Helsing's impotent scientism and insisting not just on her faith but on her "inner vision"; and in the treatment of the phantom castle, seen in ruins from the outside but complete from the inside.

We recognize the Herzog of *Heart of Glass* (both films were photographed by Jörg Schmidt-Reitwein) in the time-lapse shots of clouds and mist, where the sky runs like water and—in the closing shot—the beach sands move like wind to screen right while thin dark clouds rush to screen left; in the music of Popul Vuh, which alternates in eerie celebration with Gounod's *Sanctus,* a medieval choir, the sounds of heartbeats and footsteps and clocks, and a most effective use of the opening moments of Wagner's *Das Rheingold*; and in the gypsy's description of Borgo Pass, where "the light divides." There is also an interesting parallel with *Aguirre* (both Aguirre and Dracula were played by Klaus Kinski) in that both films show how the obsessive pursuit of power, the destructive apotheosis of conquest, can strand the hero in a dream. Aguirre and Dracula engage what little pathos they deserve by the same means: each concentrates his love on a woman he destroys, and each is hopelessly isolated in his vision of himself as superhuman.

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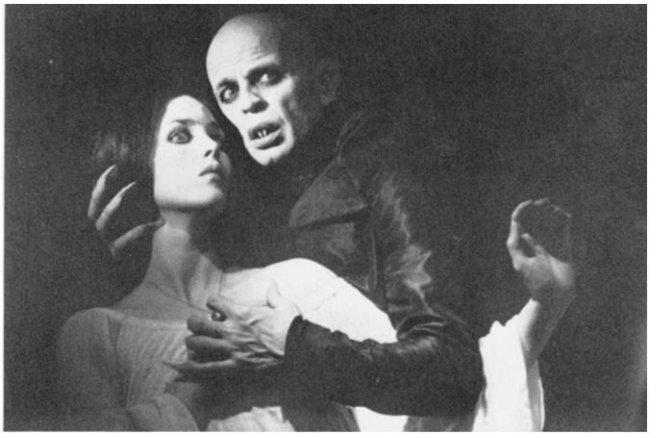

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Kinski's two performances, however, are markedly different in tone and pacing, and it is interesting to consider how Herzog's and Kinski's collaboration on *Woyzeck* (shot in two weeks just before the start of work on *Nosferatu*) may have affected Herzog's insights into the actor he has called "the only genius, the only demon of cinema"; if anything, Kinski is more soft, more pained, more acutely terrifying in *Nosferatu* than the viewer of *Aguirre* would anticipate, almost as if he had cast this oddly harsh and fragile performance inside the mold of his tortured, tensely involuted Woyzeck.

The use of color serves Kinski perfectly. Some of Schmidt-Reitwein's strongest images are of blue-white faces (Dracula, and sometimes Lucy) on black backgrounds. The scene where Dracula advances on Harker, too horror-struck to get out of his bed, is an extraordinary compound of silence and stark color, an unforgettable nightmare; Kinski is intensely *present* in a way Max Schreck (Murnau's vampire) was not. Schreck was more of a shadow, a phantom, an *allusion* than Kinski is here—a difference that is evident in their respective death-scenes. Where Schreck elegantly dissolved at the first light of dawn, becoming finally unphysical, Kinski has a violent seizure in his chest, his eyes skin to white, and he crashes into a corner of the room like a stricken bat. The subtitles of the films ought to be exchanged; where Murnau created a "Phantom of the Night," Herzog gives us "A Symphony of Horror." (Although Herzog's film is being marketed as *Nosferatu The Vampyre*, its actual title is *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht.*)

Herzog's film contains what must rank with Sybille Schmitz's bedridden transformation in Dreyer's *Vampyr* (that demonic turn of her head) as one of the very greatest scenes in all horror film. As Lucy—played with radiant intensity by Isabelle Adjani—looks in her mirror, the reflection shows her door opening as if by itself to reveal the advancing shadow of the vampire; the door closes as the shadow continues to approach, until Dracula's shadow *and hand* appear to her right. Then the Count introduces himself and offers to trade her husband's salvation for her love; Lucy replies that salvation comes from oneself alone and says that "nothing, not even God" can touch her love for Jonathan. When at the end of the film Lucy pursues her inner vision to the point of death (in a scene of erotic surrender that does not shrink from including the pain of the vampire's bites and the horrible slurping) one understands that her salvation is assured and her autonomy vindicated, even if her husband succumbs to the endless curse. The plague, which is more than a metaphor here, continues, in contrast to Murnau's vision of the complete effectiveness of Lucy's sacrifice.

Herzog both retains and resolves some of the ambiguities of Murnau's film, particularly in the relationship between Lucy and the vampire. As Miriam B. White has noted in an unpublished paper, Murnau sets up a conflict between the manifest content of the image and the narrator's version of those same events: where the narrator says that Lucy cried out a warning and her husband heard her, the image clearly shows the husband insensate and the vampire responding; where the narrator describes Lucy waiting for her husband's return, the image shows her waiting at the beach (Dracula is advancing by sea; the husband journeyed overland). What Herzog does is to establish that Lucy and Jonathan have romantic associations with the beach, where they walked during their courtship, so that Lucy's seaside vigils might be accepted as meditations on her husband (but do not have to be), while he asserts clearly that it is Dracula who hears Lucy's visionary cry. This retains the psychic erotic bond between Dracula and Lucy without confusing the presentation of Lucy's motives.

As Jonathan Harker, Bruno Ganz is a welcome change from the ineffectual and silly Jonathans of both Murnau and Browning. Virile, devoted, maddened, and finally evil, he holds up his end of what is not only the most effective but in fact the only *balanced* ensemble of power and eroticism in any horror film. Such films as *Dracula, King Kong, The Wolf Man*, the Mummy series, and certainly *Nosferatu* consistently attempt to portray a love triangle of monster, love object, and culturally normative lover, and usually end with the sexually/culturally unacceptable monster destroyed and the "girl" and "hero" safely united; they also consistently make the normative lover a sexually inexperienced boy devoid of resonance or intuition, so that the "girl" and the "monster" carry both the tragic and the erotic elements, rendering the conclusions blandly reassuring. The best exceptions to this pattern are *Alien*, where the "girl" *is* the "hero" (but the monster is not erotic), and *The*

Mummy's Ghost (1944), where Kharis and the reincarnated Ananka are united in death while the dimwit lover and cute little dog watch helplessly. In Herzog's film Adjani, Ganz, and Kinski are equally powerful and interesting, and if for no other reason this new *Nosferatu* must be considered more than a "revamping" of a paradigmatic masterpiece. —BRUCE KAWIN

GATES OF HEAVEN

Director: Errol Morris. Photography: Ned Burgess. Editing: Charles Silver.

Errol Morris's documentary about pet cemeteries is not about pet cemeteries, nor is it a documentary so much as a document about mainstream America at the crossroads in the late seventies. It is one of the most original films I have seen in years and also the most insidious, accomplishing something I would have thought impossible: it takes mediocre and vacuous middle-class Americans and makes them look mediocre and vacuous. I do not mean this in a facile sense. Any director who attempts such a film is obviously walking a tightrope, and in every scene, in every shot, is in danger of losing his balance. Morris never does. The film's project is not "exposing the pet cemetery racket," but still less does it exploit the eccentricities of pet lovers. The film rejects the more obvious and tasteful alternative of falsely humanizing its characters, and in so doing gains in aesthetic force what it surrenders in phony warmth. *Gates of Heaven* is appallingly funny, and appalling.

Still, it *is* a documentary about pet cemeteries, two California pet cemeteries—one on the verge of bankruptcy, another that is a modest success. Different sorts of people are interviewed: embalmers, renderers, people whose pets have just died, two sons going into their father's business which happens to be a pet cemetery. The people just talk. No interviewer appears directing the questions. The camera doesn't seem intent on capturing special "moments," or on recording people in action. In fact, there is little or no dramatic action (the most dramatic shot is of a young man mowing a lawn), no shaky, blurred or grainy images, no abrupt zooms, nothing is clumsily framed—the film has none of the usual signature shots of the documentary.

On the contrary, Morris serves notice almost immediately that he is up to something different. In the beginning we see a man in long shot standing beneath a tree; the voice-over that accompanies the shot provides information about a pet cemetery. There's a cut to the same man sitting in his house; he's dressed differently, a fat, red pen is clipped to the breast pocket of his crisp, brown shirt. The voice-over continues but it is no longer a voice-over—it has caught up with the man talking. And in this way it becomes clear that the usual direct sound recording common to documentaries will not necessarily be practiced, but instead the director will be using, when it suits him, the methods of displacement more common to fiction films. But, to be sure, the gains are more than a technical look of freshness. This will become evident.

No, this documentary doesn't look like a documentary. Just the opposite. *Gates of Heaven* is beautifully filmed and edited, and composed almost entirely of long, intercut monologues that manage to hold your interest, that are *compelling* not because what is being said is so fascinating, or absorbing, or informative (it almost never is), but because it is being said at all, in the manner in which it is being said. People speak English but it is an English so imprecise, so inexpressive, so *mangled*, as to have lost all meaning. One woman speaks of establishing a deep and meaningful relationship with her poodle. A young man talks about the anxiety, the *fear* involved in trying to find the right exit off the expressway—a real ontological ordeal!—and he sounds like Kierkegaard after a bad head injury. These people stud the most improbable monologues, the most incredible soliloquies, with the demented vocabularies of the advertising agency, of the different consciousness and therapeutic and awareness movements, of the social science textbook and the pop psychology best seller, of the TV talk show and the secularized church. It's as though all the crazy argots of late twentieth-century America have congealed into one monstrous cake of fat; these people fry in their own conceptual habits. The movie-goer feels like he's occupying a listening post on the border of a foreign land inhabited by sad sacks and maniacs.

On and on it goes. Yet in contrast to the circumlocutory conversations, the camera angles are neutral with a vengeance—frontal medium close-ups, neither high nor low, with people usually talking

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Errol Morris's documentary about pet cemeteries is not about pet cemeteries, nor is it a documentary so much as a document about mainstream America at the crossroads in the late seventies. It is one of the most original films I have seen in years and also the most insidious, accomplishing something I would have thought impossible: it takes mediocre and vacuous middle-class Americans and makes them look mediocre and vacuous. I do not mean this in a facile sense. Any director who attempts such a film is obviously walking a tightrope, and in every scene, in every shot, is in danger of losing his balance. Morris never does. The film's project is not "exposing the pet cemetery racket," but still less does it exploit the eccentricities of pet lovers. The film rejects the more obvious and tasteful alternative of falsely humanizing its characters, and in so doing gains in aesthetic force what it surrenders in phony warmth. *Gates of Heaven* is appallingly funny, and appalling.

Still, it *is* a documentary about pet cemeteries, two California pet cemeteries—one on the verge of bankruptcy, another that is a modest success. Different sorts of people are interviewed: embalmers, renderers, people whose pets have just died, two sons going into their father's business which happens to be a pet cemetery. The people just talk. No interviewer appears directing the questions. The camera doesn't seem intent on capturing special "moments," or on recording people in action. In fact, there is little or no dramatic action (the most dramatic shot is of a young man mowing a lawn), no shaky, blurred or grainy images, no abrupt zooms, nothing is clumsily framed—the film has none of the usual signature shots of the documentary.

On the contrary, Morris serves notice almost immediately that he is up to something different. In the beginning we see a man in long shot standing beneath a tree; the voice-over that accompanies the shot provides information about a pet cemetery. There's a cut to the same man sitting in his house; he's dressed differently, a fat, red pen is clipped to the breast pocket of his crisp, brown shirt. The voice-over continues but it is no longer a voice-over—it has caught up with the man talking. And in this way it becomes clear that the usual direct sound recording common to documentaries will not necessarily be practiced, but instead the director will be using, when it suits him, the methods of displacement more common to fiction films. But, to be sure, the gains are more than a technical look of freshness. This will become evident.

No, this documentary doesn't look like a documentary. Just the opposite. *Gates of Heaven* is beautifully filmed and edited, and composed almost entirely of long, intercut monologues that manage to hold your interest, that are *compelling* not because what is being said is so fascinating, or absorbing, or informative (it almost never is), but because it is being said at all, in the manner in which it is being said. People speak English but it is an English so imprecise, so inexpressive, so *mangled*, as to have lost all meaning. One woman speaks of establishing a deep and meaningful relationship with her poodle. A young man talks about the anxiety, the *fear* involved in trying to find the right exit off the expressway—a real ontological ordeal!—and he sounds like Kierkegaard after a bad head injury. These people stud the most improbable monologues, the most incredible soliloquies, with the demented vocabularies of the advertising agency, of the different consciousness and therapeutic and awareness movements, of the social science textbook and the pop psychology best seller, of the TV talk show and the secularized church. It's as though all the crazy argots of late twentieth-century America have congealed into one monstrous cake of fat; these people fry in their own conceptual habits. The movie-goer feels like he's occupying a listening post on the border of a foreign land inhabited by sad sacks and maniacs.

On and on it goes. Yet in contrast to the circumlocutory conversations, the camera angles are neutral with a vengeance—frontal medium close-ups, neither high nor low, with people usually talking

straight into the camera while standing beneath a tree or sitting on an upholstered couch. Does this sound mundane? It is done so rarely in documentaries that the result is fresh and startling. It's a very descriptive film. The interiors look almost constructed: armchairs, ashtrays, sofas, vases, television sets—all props, and not one out of place. People sit in these spotless, carefully arranged living rooms that might well be show rooms in furniture-store display windows, and they discuss their dogs in the most ambitious fashions, but a rose—an American Beauty?—placed carefully in the foreground intrudes into the frame like some monstrous, ambulatory growth in a science fiction film. It's as though Norman Rockwell, whistling on the way to work, has bicycled with his easel and palette into *The Twilight Zone*. Has the film-maker cheated? Has he arranged things, perhaps even suggested to people what to wear? It doesn't matter. The painful artificiality of these interiors—I would say the social precision of these interiors—corresponds perfectly with the painful artificiality of the way these people talk. They might well have been sent over from central casting. More: the self-conscious artificiality of the camera work—as something apart from the "naturalistic" camera work of most documentaries—intensifies the general atmosphere of artificiality to such an excruciating degree that one can no longer ignore the artificiality, one becomes conscious of it. In living rooms like these, in homes like these, one really couldn't talk or think any other way. The movement of a single vase, the introduction of a single straightforward sentence, would shatter the fragile social shell, the delicate protective covering, in which these people live. It would make it impossible, at least momentarily, to hold at bay the fear and loneliness which is never really "held at bay," but which resides deep in the heart of the general *Weltanschauung*. But of course that would also be a start.

The film replaces the usual tension of documentaries with a new kind of tension: there's no Marcel Ophuls holding up a microphone to French collaborators and ex-Nazis, no Oriana Fallaci pursuing a tough line of questioning with some powerful head of state. No one's trying to evade anything. That's what's so depressing; it's the other way around. These very ordinary people are so innocent, so anxious, so *eager* to express themselves, to explain their "philosophies of life." A husband and a wife seem to discover in front of the camera that they have different theological notions with regards to the hereafter—the woman, at any rate, feels confident she will be reunited in heaven with her dead pet. (One cemetery owner underwrites these reunions.) A young man who helps run his father's pet cemetery business delivers a pep talk, a Dale Carnegie refresher course, on how to succeed in life. He describes how he advanced from salesman to sales *manager*, and you can really hear the italics in his voice; he's like a madman in a Thomas Bernhard novel. In his office he sits behind a desk that's covered with business trophies. It's not even a question of anticipatory set-ups; it's clearly a prearranged situation: this isn't documentary realism, it's movieland. No one works at a desk that cluttered with trophies—there's no *room* to work. But at least that much is self-evident. His monologue, on the other hand, is all too real. He explains that he likes interviewing job applicants in this office because he feels it inspires potential employees. They *project* themselves into his place. But at the same time he seems unaware that he himself is addressing the camera like a nervous young job applicant, like someone trying to get a purchase on life by expounding his own (hopefully) exemplary views. It's very funny at first. But a measure of the film's penetrative power is that every laugh boomerangs; after a while it's no longer funny.

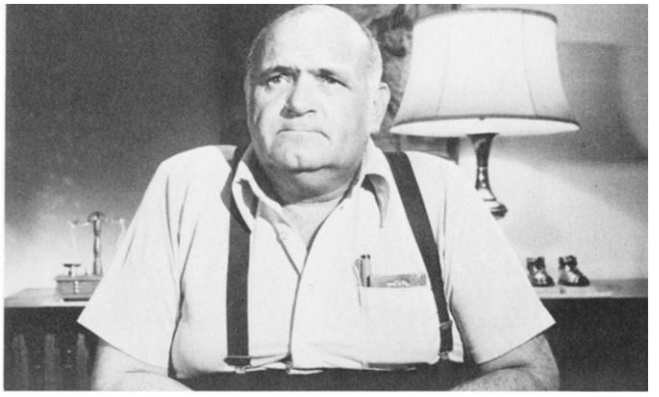
Morris is a naif who has made an impolite movie; he doesn't seem to realize that it's an unspoken rule that one's not supposed to show real people, ordinary people, looking so sad, so silly, so depressing. "He can't make fun of people like that. He's going too far," some will say, but they should have said of the others, "They haven't gone far enough." It's permissible to catch powerful people in lies, in contradictions, to show them for the megolomaniacs that they might be, or to elicit sympathy for the poor, the incarcerated, the deranged. There's a grammar for documentary film-making which Morris has ignored.

Yet it is not a contempt of "ordinary" people that the film displays, but a deep and unabiding contempt for the usual methods of documentary realism, a contempt for the quasi-aleatory methods of a *cinéma vérité*, certainly the dominant tendency of the sixties and seventies, that would pretend its

"direct" methods do not interfere with the way events take place in reality, that would claim its methods discover what people are trying to hide, the cutting journalistic truths that never cut too deeply. *Gates of Heaven* doesn't look like anything *but* a manipulated picture of reality. (On the other hand, we learn only in retrospect how Flaherty reconstructed Nanook's igloo so that his camera could film its interior.) Its syntax runs counter to the usual documentary syntax. Its formalistic language, its tight and precise framing, its symmetrical compositions and, for the most part, static camera work, the careful cropping and insertion of photographs of (say) people's pets within the frame, the recurring visual motifs; all make it *look* more like a non-documentary film by Wenders, or Akerman, or Huillet and Straub. It's neither as frantic nor as personal as a documentary by Herzog; perhaps a film essay by Godard is its closest cousin.

And although the viewer knows that the most realistic-looking documentary is never objective; although the viewer understands that the investigative film-maker, when all is said and done, still selects footage and adopts a certain editing style; although the viewer accepts, begrudgingly perhaps, that nothing is ever as it really happened (*pace* Wiseman letting his unloaded camera stand around for several weeks so that his subjects grow "accustomed" to it); although the viewer knows all these things, he himself remains accustomed himself to viewing the realistic-looking documentary as though it were somehow real. Yet there is a paradox. The usual documentary, availing itself of the usual methods, trapping people in contradictions, capturing people during "privileged" moments, almost never—for all its apparent spontaneity—astonishes or overwhelms the viewer: General Westmoreland *does* believe the Vietnamese place no value on life (*Hearts and Minds*); Nazis *are* callous, even years later (*The Sorrow and the Pity*); poor people *do* lead difficult lives (from *Man of Aran* to *Welfare*). Various realities are presented approximately as the thoughtful viewer had imagined them, but precisely because these filmed realities conform to the viewer's conceptions, the films only serve to protect the viewer from a more comprehensive and disruptive grasp of reality.

Perhaps at one time such documentaries, with their jagged rawness, did seem to approximate



GATES OF HEAVEN

reality in all its jagged rawness, but this no longer seems the case. Now they approximate nothing so much as—other documentaries. In contrast, a film like *Gates of Heaven,* which does not make a show of its "naturalness," achieves a far more startling degree of realness. The film lacks the usual shock absorbers. Despite its rigor, despite its formalism, despite its posing, despite its artificiality, despite all these things, *Gates of Heaven* overwhelms the viewer with the sheer, incredible horror of life as it often is in the quietest, most everyday moments. I say *despite its,* but I really mean *because of;* it should be clear that Morris hasn't actually ignored the grammar common to documentary film-making, but proceeded from an all too precise understanding of it.

For such a modest subject—pet cemeteries—the film achieves an astonishing depth. I think the gains of Morris's methods and artifices are apparent. But there is something else. Approximately two-thirds of the way through the movie, after a number of surreal interviews, an old woman named Florence delivers a long, brooding monologue: her beloved dog is dead, the neighborhood cat has vanished, and her only son—"no good"—almost never visits. It's her life story, not a very happy story, but neither especially unusual. But it's affecting, vivid, and the viewer suddenly finds himself—but with much preparation—in the presence of a pain, a sorrow, so naked and so powerful that all the film's artifice drops away, and the horror is out in the open, a horror which, up until this point, has been delicately held in balance by the acrid humor of the film. The story of this old woman, in the tritest, strictest and yet broadest sense, is the story of everyone.

It's an incredibly bleak film. The last image is a long, stationary shot of the cemetery at dusk.

No people, no pets—just a long, forlorn shot of soft, green countryside. Everything is so quiet, so mournful. The image is held for perhaps thirty seconds. It blinks out. —MICHAEL COVINO

SOFT FICTION

Chick Strand's *Soft Fiction* (1979) is a 60-minute, black-and-white personal documentary that brilliantly portrays the survival power of female sensuality. Like earlier Strand films such as *Mosori Monika* (1971) and *Cosas de mi Vida* (1975) that also celebrate human survival, it combines the ethnographic documentary with a sensuous lyrical expressiveness more frequently found in independent cinema. As in the Maysles brothers' *Grey Gardens* and the best of Wiseman documentaries, Strand focuses her camera on people talking about their own experience, capturing subtle nuances in facial expressions and gestures that are rarely found in dramatic features. Yet she frankly acknowledges the presence of the camera and the effect it has on her subjects, for the power of artistic manipulation is part of the territory she is exploring.

The title *Soft Fiction* works on several levels. It evokes the soft line between truth and fiction that characterizes Strand's own approach to documentary. The film presents five women relating a powerful personal experience directly to the camera. The range of topics includes an erotic fantasy about a bannister, a sexual adventure at a rodeo, incest with a grandfather, a deliberate trade-off of drug addiction for romantic love, and a painful childhood memory of persecution by the Nazis. Although the content of these stories could mark these women as victims, the amazing thing is that they all emerge as strong survivors—partly because of the way they perceive, interpret and recreate the experience for the camera. Presumably these stories are true, and yet the style of delivery, the tone of voice, the structure of the narrative all raise questions in our minds about how the material has been reworked, revised or censored for an audience. In an interview following the screening at OASIS,[1] Chick Strand told me:

> It was an incredible experience to shoot and record these stories. For each of the women, it was an exorcism of the experience. They knew they'd be up there on the screen, that strangers would see it. There'd be no backing out.

Strand's artistic manipulation is apparent in the sequential arrangement of the stories (each tale alters our understanding of the previous episodes), the choice of visuals that accompany and shape the meaning of the monologue, and the fictional journey that she uses as a narrative frame. In an early sequence, as the hand-held camera moves through a house searching for the first narrator, we briefly glimpse on a white wall the shadow of the film-maker. We're always aware of Strand's presence as the totally absorbed listener, whose fascination with the material is based on her own personal experience—perhaps even on a similar story which is also being exorcised in the film-making process but is never explicitly told. It's the back story or the shadow version of what's being narrated on screen, further softening the line between truth and fiction in Strand's special brand of personal documentary.

The title also evokes soft core fiction, which is appropriate to the film's erotic content and style. Not only are many of the stories highly sensual, but also the sultry music on the sound track and the texture of the film's visual surface. It's rare to find an erotic film with a female perspective dominating both the narrative discourse and the visual and audio rhythms, but that's precisely what we have in *Soft Fiction*. Like erotic foreplay, the opening sequence gets us in a receptive mood for the gestures and images to follow. As we hear the sound of a train, we see blurred images through a window. Strand immediately suggests that she intends to use both the audio and visual tracks of the film medium as a vehicle for a female perspective: "Trains can be symbolically linked with men, but the idea of riding on a train is somehow linked to women—perhaps because on a train you see everything in between." The soft focus and the accelerated motion render the visual images abstract, yet the rhythm and patterning of horizontal lines have a sensual appeal that is relaxing. Gradually the audio track develops a comparable richness as the sound of the train is overlaid with a woman's voice singing a ritualistic chant. As both image and sound become more representational, the sensuality intensifies. We see a woman (Amy Halpren) seated by a window in a moving train. Although the abstract images are still visible

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through the window, we watch the light and shadow playing through the weave of her straw hat. The extreme close-up makes us very aware of the texture of the woman's skin, hair and mouth. Then we see her legs, from an odd low upward angle, as she pursues her journey on foot. As the image alternates between face and legs, we hear continuously on the sound track a voice-over of a woman from TV yoga exercise program describing physical moves designed to make us relax "with a feather soft touch . . . as if to say yes." The voice-over enables us to see that the woman's journey is also an inner exploration of mental processes and body rhythms. The soothing voice choreographs our breathing: "And now you're breathing to become . . . deep within you . . . enjoy the stillness, breath in, breath out." Since we still hear the chanting, music, and sounds of the train behind the verbal incantation, the sound track becomes as dense and hypnotic as the visuals, both of which draw us into the film's sensual rhythms.

This sensual movement never stops, for it is carried forward by the train of audio and visual images that are subtly interwoven, and by the narrative thread of the woman's fictional journey that draws together the five individual monologues. Most of the sequences that develop the journey continue to enrich the interweaving of light and shadow, to contrast interiors and exteriors, and to underscore the themes of growth, control and survival. The next time we see Amy, the woman from the train, we peer at her through a window covered with foliage; leaving her outside, we follow the camera as it penetrates the deeper interiors of the house. After the first monologue, we glimpse Amy as a silhouette against a bright window, watering plants in a darkened room, then watch her through the same window watering the garden outside. After the third speaker, we see the silhouette of a nude woman (Simone Gad) dancing to Sidney Bechet's lush rendition of "Petite Fleur." The outlines of her wild hair, sinuous arms, and swaying torso break the patterns of the light background, creating images that are simultaneously abstract and sensual.

Between the last two monologues, we witness survivors of three accidents or potentially fatal encounters. In the first scene, a three-legged dog carefully rearranges itself in a comfortable chair that stands in a room decorated with a rich clash of textured fabrics with intricate designs, as in a painting by Matisse. The visuals of the next scene offer a stark contrast. The white face and hands of a woman (Cathy Freeman) float against a black background, as if she were a ghost. As she sings Schubert's "Death and the Maiden," the lyrics are translated in white subtitles.

Go by me
Grim reaper
Don't deny me
The dreams of my youth
Give me your hand
You have nothing to fear from me
I come as a friend
Not as an avenger
Be of good heart
And sleep free in my arms
Far from danger

These lyrics comment on the stories told by the other women, obscuring the boundaries between this sequence and the other monologues. In the personal narratives the threatening male Other always appears in human form—as a cowboy, an incestuous grandfather, a killer/lover, and a Nazi—but in this more conventionalized version he is a personification of Death. The song makes us realize that the other episodes are merely individual variations on the inevitable encounter with destruction, which we are all bound to experience. The third scene returns to Amy, pursuing her journey, carrying her straw hat and a suitcase through a bower covered with grapevines. When her suitcase accidentally opens and spills the contents on the path, she picks up a black cloth and waves it

SOFT FICTION: *Amy on the train* ►

in the air, as if courageously signalling death or lyrically breaking the light.

After the final monologue, we return to the earlier images of Amy's face and legs, this time associated with waters of renewal. The visuals grow more abstract; then we see a naked woman riding on horseback, her body breaking the light and creating sensual patterns as in the earlier sequences of the dance and the straw hat. The close-ups reveal her smiling with pleasure and allow us to savor the textures of her skin and hair and of the horse's mane glistening in the sun. In the final shot we see the woman's hands firmly holding the reins, suggesting that Strand similarly uses her artistic control to reaffirm the survival power of female sensuality. The screen goes black but we still hear the train, signalling that the journey continues, and we see the final title, reminding us that this film covers spatial and temporal moves in Strand's own life: "1976-79 *Hollywood Tujunga.*"

The title *Soft Fiction* also evokes softness as a female characteristic that can be interpreted both negatively and positively. In a pejorative sense, softness implies weakness and victimization, a quality that makes one susceptible to outside pressure. In the monologues, the outside pressure is usually exerted by males. Strand intends to make a sequel to this film entitled *Hard Fiction*, in which men will tell similar stories. On the other hand, softness also implies flexibility and thereby functions as a positive mode of survival and creative transformation. This is precisely how Strand had used it in her earlier film *Elasticity* (1975), her most autobiographical film to date.

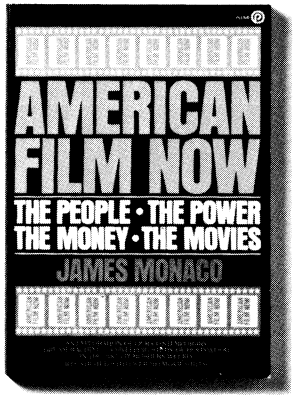
This positive sense of softness dominates the opening monologue by film critic Beverle Houston,[2] in which she describes a strong erotic urge to be transformed into an art piece with long slow curves.

> I had a warm feeling, a wave of desire went through my body to become this railing, to become this piece, to become those curves, that shape. . . . I could feel it in my cells . . . like the warmth of desire that makes you feel your bones are soft.

Strand claims that Beverle's erotic fantasy provided the germinal seed for the whole film.

> Beverle Houston and I were at an art opening. We walked down stairs and saw a nice bannister. Beverle

WHY ARE MOVIES BIGGER BUT NOT BETTER THAN EVER?



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> started telling about that other piece she had seen at the Pasadena Museum. I found out something about Bev I didn't know—that she was a sensuous person. I told other people that I was making a film, using this story, and they would tell me other stories. That's how the film grew.

The special generative function of this story is revealed, not only by its position as the opening monologue, but also by the way Strand chooses to shoot it. The camera moves down a staircase as if searching for a subject. It passes by Beverle, who is seated in the living room rather self-consciously in a formal black gown. As the camera moves on to the kitchen, Beverle begins her narrative in a voice-over. As soon as she mentions the bannister, she captures the full attention of the camera, which cuts to an extreme close-up of her face. This sequence introduces the visual style that Strand will follow in most of the other monologues: huge talking heads that reveal the facial gestures of the speakers, with brief cutaways to close-ups of their hands. In the case of Beverle, the hand is strong, expressive, and well manicured. She speaks in passionate, hushed tones, yet her pace is slow and halting, forcing the listener to hang on every word. Her pun on *piece* introduces the fusion of art and sex, which remain united through the rest of the film. Strand intends *Soft Fiction* to be as sensual as the bannister with its spiral curves flowing outward; it aspires to be a piece that will make women identify with its soft core. After the camera leaves Beverle, her transformational mode lingers in a voice-over: "Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be a black cat . . . to move through the world in fur?" Her question introduces the film's recurring motif of the cat, which is traditionally associated with female sexuality, identifying it first as a soft sensuous texture.

The other four monologues play with the positive and negative meanings of softness as if they were light and shade. The women flirt with danger and victimization, yet take pride in their malleability and survival. Because of this tension, these stories are primarily responsible for the film's emotional impact. The second monologue—a comic tale of an erotic adventure at a rodeo—is *read* by Karen Amend, a pretty handwriting analyst. No matter how carefully we scrutinize her gestures—her ironic smiles, spontaneous laughter, and coquettish toying with her hair—we are not really sure whether this is her own story. The magnifying glass and critical skills she uses to analyse the handwriting may be devious props. Strand claims that the story is *not* Karen's and that she purposely used the third take of the reading to increase the ambiguity. The line between truth and fiction is further obscured by the evasiveness of the author and by the inclusion in the story of another artistic cover—the art of photography. The woman goes to the rodeo with a camera, using it as a prop. When a cowboy asks her if she wants to take his picture in the nude, she answers "sure" because she assumes it's impossible. But he and two of his friends take her to a dormitory, where they force her to go down on all three. Her bravado prevents her from seeing that her sexual submission was inevitable from the start. While this sexual encounter could easily be interpreted as a gang bang, the presence of the camera and her own sense of humor provide the woman with some sense of control. She admits that she tried to use the camera as a distraction so that she could get away, then covers her failure with a joke: "I never made it, but he did." After it's all over, one of the cowboys offers to fuck her in return, but she's more concerned with getting out with her camera unharmed: "I had escaped both injury and scandal. I felt ecstatically in control again . . . safe in a public place." As if to prove that she's totally recovered her power and audacity, she approaches another cowboy who is even handsomer than the others and repeats the whole process, intentionally. This time they go to a horse stall. After he comes like the other three, he tells her this experience doesn't mean anything, "It will make a good story to tell your grandchildren"—or her friend Chick Strand! Again she feels safe because of the anonymity of this encounter—an anonymity she tries to retain in Strand's film. Her story's punch line is: "But photography is a power to be reckoned with." The cowboy's name is clearly visible on his belt buckle in the photograph; now she knows where he lives and is obsessed with calling him. Photography helps her get hooked on a zipless fuck! As Strand shows us Karen laughing at the end of the narrative, we can't help but think that the punch line totally dissolves the lines between truth and fiction, identification and disguise, by applying equally well to all three women

who are artistically responsible for this scene—subject/author, actress/analyst, camerawoman/editor. The story's humorous tone and its ironic development of the art/sex fusion also makes us see Beverle Houston's erotic fantasy from a new perspective—as another example of female sexual braggadochia!

In the next monologue, a story of incest, the comic tone and coy disguise totally vanish. The film cuts to a static shot of a brightly lit kitchen—which resembles a set-up in Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman*. A young woman in the nude (Melissa Lou Beal) enters the room, pours herself a glass of juice, turns on an electric fan and a radio, and then starts to cook breakfast for herself. The radio serial *Grand Central Station* immediately dominates the sound track, developing the train image into a structural principle that controls the whole film. In this radio melodrama, all trains lead into the heart of the city, the juncture for the individual stories. This commentary makes us reinterpret *Soft Fiction* as urban soap opera, of a highly self-reflexive variety. We are even told that the stories will include "those who have been intimidated by the heavy perfume of the theater." We also learn that this particular narrative "is a love story."

As soon as we see her crack open the eggs in a frying pan, we hear Melissa begin her narrative in a soft, husky, twang. It's a sexy voice with a tone of intimacy. The whole story is told in voice-over. We gauge its authenticity by the sound of Melissa's voice. Despite the fact that she is the youngest and most vulnerable of the storytellers and the only one seen in the nude, we recognize her strength and survival powers in the sturdiness of her body, the sureness and independence of her physical movements, the hardiness of her appetite, and her ability to see the incest from multiple perspectives.

The story begins with a lyrical sensuous description appropriate to romance. She tells of diving into green water like a fish, diving in and out. Then she runs to grandpa, who is waiting for her with a big towel and open arms. At first it sounds like a female version of the nostalgic memory from Fellini's 8½, where little Guido is lovingly wrapped in a towel by his mother, but this incest is consummated.

> I was young, only seven, but we would make love on the couch, a red corduroy couch, we had a cat who would jump on the couch, a black cat with green eyes, and I trusted grandpa, and the fire would dance off the cat's eyes.

The amazing thing about this narrative is Melissa's ability to see both her own victimization in the situation and also the sensuous richness of the experience. The incest doesn't defeat her because she has a strong feline resilience of body, perception, and spirit. She deals with her experience like a writer, carefully choosing her words, gradually building an image with an artistic control that helps subdue the threatening content.

> I remember once I saw his penis . . . and it was so strange, like a snake, it had a head just like a snake, a velvet snake, a pink velvet snake."

As we watch her in close-up, cutting her toast and chewing her food, we hear her justify her grandfather and assume part of the responsibility for the sexual encounter, making explicit what the woman in the rodeo story only implied.

> He would make me feel good, he said he wanted to teach me how to make love . . . [cut to a close-up of the egg yolks being broken by a spoon] . . . he taught me how to be sensual I guess, I guess that's what he wanted . . . It's almost as if I felt I wanted it to happen.

The visual choices confirm that he succeeded in teaching her to develop her own sensuality and to take responsibility for her own body. Her intelligence and honesty allow her to admit her own vulnerability and the fact that she learned other devious habits as well.

> Sometimes I didn't want to admit what happened. It was too close, and too strong, and it would scare me. Sometimes I wouldn't allow myself to be aware of what we were doing. . . . I would feign being asleep—all typical female tactics of avoidance and I learned them young . . . now I'm a master at them. I felt captured, really captured, because there was no way out.

Unlike the other storytellers, she is able to acknowledge both sides of softness—the flexibility and the passivity. She is able to see the Protean power of disguise, not only as creative transformation like Beverle and Karen, but also as a defensive survival strategy in a no-exit trap. Although Melissa's episode ends with a fade to white, it is immediately followed by the ecstatic nude dancing of Simone Gad. The dancer may remind us of Saraghina, the embodiment of demonic female sexuality who dances at the end of Fellini's memory

sequence, but in Strand's version the surviving sensuality is totally reaffirmed.

The next story is told by Johanna Demetrakas, a Hollywood editor and strong feminist film-maker (director of documentaries on two communal art projects by Judy Chicago—*Woman's House* and *The Dinner Party*), who seriously rivals Strand in controlling the artistic manipulation within the sequence. Strand cuts directly to a tight close-up of Johanna's face and stays there throughout the entire sequence, except for brief cutaways to close-ups of her hand holding a cigarette, a potential sign of an addictive personality. Occasionally the image shows only half of her face, highlighting the vitality of her hair and eyes or the sensuality of her mouth. The content of the story is pure masochism—consecutive addictions to a man and to heroin. But the delivery totally transforms it into a story of incredible will power and mental strength. It's as if Johanna denies that her identity can be defined by what happens to her; like a character in a novel by Henry James, she insists that the quality of her own consciousness creates her reality. She makes the story her own erotic art piece. According to Strand:

> I told Johanna about my film and she said she had a story, too. After we talked, she decided to do it for her acting class. The night she did it, she called me up afterward all exicted. Then she did it again for my film.

When the stylized language and delivery of her opening lines, Johanna immediately establishes a female macho persona.

> When I lived in Paris, I was very promiscuous . . . sex in the afternoon, midnight rendezvous, reading Wittgenstein in the morning. When I moved to New York, I decided it was time to get hooked on a man. So I moved to New York and found myself a real killer. This guy was a real killer and I was really hooked.

Johanna asserts that she consciously chooses her addictions, totally confident that she can become unhooked whenever she decides it's the right moment. Instead of making her seem weak, this story reveals her to be a woman of formidable power. Although she admits that "pain is total environment and I was hooked on total environment," she claims "I was not a masochist . . . so I *decided* to replace one total environment with another total environment to get rid of the pain." Johanna forces us to see each of the preceding narratives as another example of a total environment (the railing, the rodeo dormitory, the incestuous relationship) in which the narrator helped to create the nature of the reality; we also realize that all the previous storytellers recognized this power. At each point in her own story, Johanna takes full responsibility for what happens to her, even if she romanticizes the extent of her control.

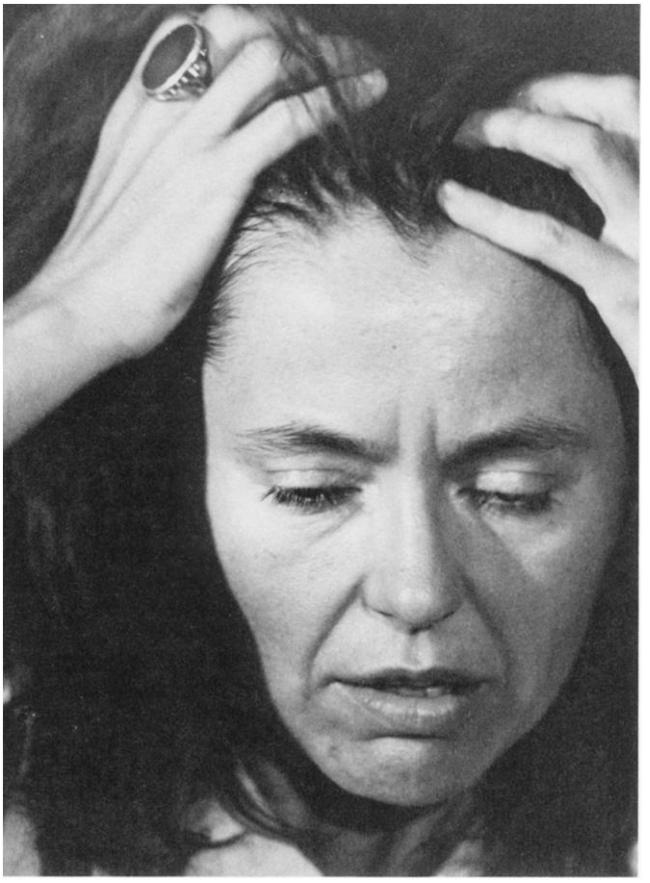
> I decided to get hooked on something I could touch and see, so that I could control it. Of course when you're really hooked, you're not in control but that's part of the romance.

Despite the stylization of her narrative, Johanna convinces us—through the power of her face, the sureness of her tone, the directness of her stare—that she really does have this strength of will. Yet, she doesn't underestimate the power of drugs or romance. Instead, she offers a novel perspective that seems self-evident as soon as it's spoken and that makes her quitting all the more impressive.

> It's interesting about being hooked—there's always something good, or else you don't get hooked. Actually it was great fun, you meet a lot of interesting people on the streets . . . It was good, it was sensual, it had its own ambience, its own world. I asked myself, why am I quitting, it's so good, so clear, so real, and so spacious?

In her story the primary issue is clearly self-control. She quits simply because "that was the plan. I kicked, I never tried it again, and I exorcised him." Johanna acknowledges that her participation in this film (like that of the other storytellers) serves not only to display her own artistic and sexual bravado, but also to exorcise a painful period of her life. Although her story focuses on sensual experience, Johanna emerges as an exorcist with considerable mental and spiritual power.

Chick Strand lets Johanna present this total affirmation of human will with full strength and clarity, yet she undercuts it somewhat by choosing what follows—the singing of "Death and the Maiden" and the final narrative about the Holocaust, both of which define the limits of personal survival and creative transformation by shifting the "total environment" from sex to death. Yet even in these confrontations with the forces of Thanatos, we see that the individual is able to exert considerable control through the conventions and selectivity of art.



SOFT FICTION: *Hedy*

The final story is told by Hedy Sontag, a fine actress who ironically is the least stylized of all the narrators. Strand told me, "The best experience I had was with Hedy. It was so high and intense." Hedy begins very defensively: "Okay, this is going to be a little bit difficult." Everything we see on the screen indicates this is an understatement: she shakes her head, sips some wine, furrows her forehead in pain, pauses in mid sentence, contradicts herself. She gives us two hard facts: "I was born in Poland in 1941, which was right in the middle of the war, and I came to the United States in 1949." After defining the temporal borders of this painful memory, she retreats, relying on (in Melissa's words) "the typical female tactics of avoidance."

> It's hard to talk about things like this, but . . . I'm embarrassed, no, yes, I'm embarrassed. I've had experiences I keep struggling with to this day, and one of these is opening up to being vulnerable.

We realize that in this sequence all of the survival strategies from the earlier narratives are being tested, not by a personal domestic tragedy, but by the Holocaust—the greatest challenge to physical and spiritual survival in recent history. It's hardly surprising that this final storyteller is the most hesitant. She relies primarily on forgetting as her main defense against the horror she has experienced, which makes us wonder what the other woman have omitted from their narratives. Yet, like the others, Hedy is still a survivor.

Gradually, details are selected from her painful memories—the disclosure by a 16-year-old boy next door that there were Jews being hidden in her house, the need for her as a cute three-year old to flirt with the Nazi who came to investigate, her "job" of sitting on his lap to distract his attention away from those who were hiding. As if to distract *our* attention, Strand cuts away to a shot of Hedy's hand playing with a cat, who is rubbing against her boot. The images of the cat and the boot materialize as associations, rather than as segments of a linear narrative. As the story becomes more continuous, the camera cuts back to Hedy's expressive face.

> I was awakened when I was 3½, I remember the noises—running, yelling, and screaming, and the next thing I know we were being rushed out of the house and taken for a very long walk. I insisted that we take my kittens with us [laughs]. I had little kittens, they were born in my cradle, and my father put them in a bird cage.

It is this vivid detail of the kittens that she singles out and clings to like a piece of velvet—because it is associated with warmth and love and security although it resides among those memories of pain and terror. The survival powers of the cat—its sensuous warmth and resilience, introduced in the previous stories—are now reaffirmed, not only by Hedy's narrative, but also by Strand's choice of visuals. Despite all the previous verbal allusions, this is the first time we've seen a cat on screen. It's as if this feline image were a guidepost for Hedy, leading her to find other safe spots and to avoid the land mines in her memory.

> It was necessary for me to be brave and I liked that then, and I like that now that I was brave then. And I remember a hill with fire and explosions of all sorts. I remember how frightened everyone was and my father carrying the birdcage with the kit-

tens. And I remember feeling proud that I didn't want to be carried. And I remember that hill and there was something very bad going on the other side, and then there's a blank.

Like Karen, Melissa, and Johanna, she remembers her own acts of courage and assumes as much responsibility for what happened to her as possible. Like Johanna, this might lead her to romanticize the extent of her own conscious control. Like Melissa, she avoids the most painful moments and details and chooses her words and images with extreme caution. But most important, as in all the previous sequences of *Soft Fiction*, Hedy's story reaffirms the tough resilience of the human spirit —a theme that Chick Strand continues to celebrate in her brilliant, innovative personal documentaries.

—MARSHA KINDER

NOTES

1. L.A. Film OASIS is a collective of L.A.-based film-makers, which for the last four years has been presenting excellent weekly programs of independent films from all over the world. Its screenings are currently scheduled on Sunday evenings at L.A.I.C.A.
2. The professions of most of the storytellers are not identified in the film. Although this information is not essential to understand and appreciate the stories in *Soft Fiction*, I am including it here because I know most of these women and this knowledge affects my interpretation of their narratives.

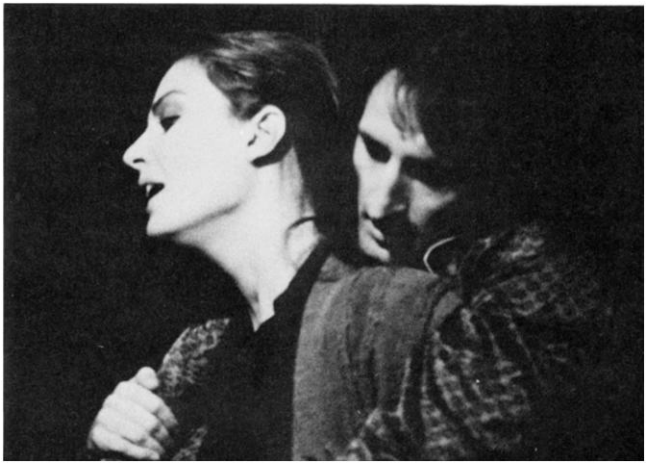
IDLERS OF THE FERTILE VALLEY

(I Tembelides tis Eforis Kiladas) Directed and written by Nikos Panayotopoulos, from the novel by Albert Cossery. Photography: Andreas Bellis. Music: Mahler. Editor: Yorghos Triantafylou.

Having won first place at the Locarno festival and second place at Chicago, Nikos Panayotopoulos's *Idlers of the Fertile Valley* (1978) has escaped the anonymity and neglect normally reserved for Greek films. Unfortunately, the film's lack of commercial appeal may prevent it from finding a larger American audience outside the film festival circuit and special screenings such as those at the Pacific Film Archive recently. At the PFA *Idlers*, by coincidence, concluded a month-long retrospective of Greek film which included *The Colors of the Rainbow* (1974), Panayotopoulos's first film. In this film Panayotopoulos demonstrated his knowledge and mastery of European and American cinema evidenced by the light-handed verve with which he makes filmic puns on, among others, Buñuel, Godard, Truffaut, westerns and whodunnits as well as the conventions of Greek commercial movies. Although his two films are quite different, they give us a sense of Panayotopoulos's gentleness, his humor and dedication to man as the measure of things.

Idlers is not the sort of work one has come to expect from Greek directors who even at their best have tended to be timid and provincial. Lately, however, things have been changing in Greece. Commercial cinema has been done in by television, censorship, and the lack of money. In its place, a new generation of film-makers has begun to introduce experimental and innovative elements in an attempt to rejuvenate the Greek film industry. The only constant is the lack of money which has restricted most of the many aspiring film-makers to limit their work to short films—in 1978, only fifteen full-length films were produced in Greece. With a budget of less than $150,000, Panayotopoulos had to depend on the donated time of the actors and crew to make ends meet.

Panayotopoulos's characters function as signs, as metaphors, for human states of being. They do not have specific identities, but are representative of all humanity—as are, for example, the characters of Beckett or Ionesco. In his limitation of dialogue and concentration on spectacle—brilliant color, music, the use of actors in understated, limited roles which reduce their parts to gestures, to mere symbolic elements of his mythical vision—Panayotopoulos has filmed a magical drama of the sort Artaud would have imagined. Indeed, Artaud would have found the total effect of Panayo-



IDLERS OF THE FERTILE VALLEY ▶

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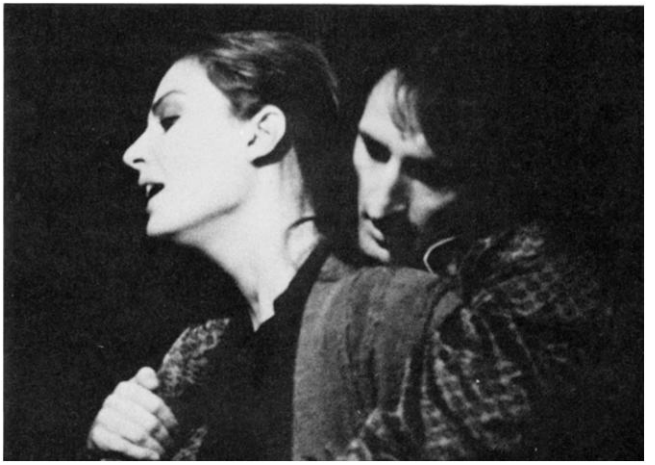

IDLERS OF THE FERTILE VALLEY ▶

topoulos's film compatible with his idea of the metaphysical role of the artist: to give concrete expression to a unified vision of the world for his fellow beings who have been disoriented by the seemingly disparate nature of our technological and over-analytical age. In order to encourage the viewer's active and thoughtful participation, Panayotopoulos opts for what, at times, seem to be interminable (boring, to some) long shots—a sort of Brechtian distancing. The long take does not bore in *Idlers* where it is as appropriate to the gentle unfolding of the action as Mahler's First Symphony.

The opening scenes of *Idlers* give no hint of what is to come, instead they seem to contain the seeds of the melodrama typical of Greek movies. The film begins with a wake in a dead man's luxuriously appointed apartment. His brother and three nephews are there to mourn as well as to contemplate an inheritance which absolves them of all financial cares. Included in the inheritance is Sofia, a beautiful maid. Here are the makings of a many-sided story of love with room for the usual complications: jealousy, revenge, class struggle, greed, sibling rivalry, the story of Phaedra and Hippolytos in contemporary garb. However, Panayotopoulos frustrates our expectations.

The action of the film can be easily summarized. The father (Vassilis Diamantopoulos) and sons move into the inherited villa and there, relieved of any need to exert themselves, slowly surrender to a life of sloth and self-indulgence. Sofia (Olga Karlatos) cooks for them, cleans house, satisfies their sexual needs and, as they become increasingly bedridden, supplies them with a clean chamber pot to relieve themselves. What might have been a critique of the exploitation of the working class and of woman in general develops into a mythical examination of man in his natural state, unburdened by the fear of death, necessity or the anguish of conscious existence.

There is no generation gap in this family whose young men obediently fulfill their father's injunction to be idle. Only Sakis (Yorghos Dialegmenos), the youngest son, is occasionally visited by a vague temptation to industriousness and rebellion. As the others become weaker due to their inactivity, he maintains his strength by venturing into th woods with the intention of leaving home one da and finding work somewhere.

His brother, Nikos (Dimitris Poulikakos), who once visited a factory and saw people actually working, testifies "They were the worst moments of my life." Sakis protests that he is not afraid of work even though it is obvious that he has not the least idea of what it means. His first attempt to break out is aborted because Sofia reveals his intentions to the father. The ensuing family council, at which the father implores the son not to break his heart by doing something as base as leaving home in search of work, is charged with the grotesque humor and logic associated with Beckett and Ionesco. The traditional values associated with the middle class have been set on their head and the result is an insight into the lives of those whose wealth permits them to insulate themselves from reality. (In her notebook, Joan Didion records being given a similar insight by a Greek shipping heiress who asked, "when I arrived to interview her in her orchid-filled sitting room on the second day of a paralyzing New York blizzard, whether it was snowing outside.") Sakis tries again to escape at the end of the film. However, his decrepitude is such that his flight, abetted this time by Sofia, is punctuated by long naps. The film ends with Sakis asleep in Sofia's arms in a pose which ironically recalls Michaelangelo's *pietà*.

Idlers is both a critique of the middle class and a comment of the nature of its success. The men are the heirs of the middle class, which, having attained political and economic supremacy after centuries of unparalleled activity and creativity, has fallen into decline while callously exploiting the toil of the common person.

Sofia represents the working class. Unaware that she is being exploited, she willingly supports the meaningless lives of her exploiters. She loves Sakis even though there is not the remotest chance he will ever be capable of reciprocating her feelings. Her condition is common to her sex regardless of class.

In a final fling with traditional values Nikos considers marrying the woman he loves, but he is dissuaded by his father and eldest brother, Yannis (Nikitas Tsakiroglou), who convincingly argues that a woman on the premises would mean the return of the influence of civilization which the men have assiduously been trying to escape.

Panayotopoulos's political vision is clearly rooted in contemporary Greek experience. Modern Greece has been almost continuously ruled by a gerontocracy which would prefer nothing more than to keep the younger members of society asleep. The demands placed on Sofia are an only slightly exaggerated caricature of the traditional role of women in Greek society. Of course, the above instances are not peculiar to Greece, but are typical of most human society.

More important, *Idlers* has a libidinal aspect which carries it far beyond social criticism. In a sense, the brothers and the father are not the exploiters of Sofia, but simply persons who have reached the end of the long, circular journey of human consciousness and are prepared to enjoy their reward which is to be relieved of the burden of civilization. The fairy-tale setting of the movie (the beautiful Kifissia villa with its idyllic wooded garden, its abundant food and drink) and the presence of Sofia (more than a woman, she is beauty, abundance, sexual satisfaction), make the film a dream of release from civilized constraint. With the help of Sofia, the men give up the complex, prosthetic persona of civilized behavior created as a defense against death to return to the condition of natural man. Thanatos is entirely forgotten as the men, with the exception of Sakis, adjust to a world in which the variety of their erotic needs (sex, food, drink, excretion) are immediately and unswervingly tended to by Sofia.

As the film progresses the behavior of the men no longer exhibits the supercilious worldliness of the opening scenes, rather it has an oneiric innocence tempered only by the viewer's cultural values. Their demands of the maid seem little more than the acts of natural beings seeking only the basic necessities of life. Indeed, the underlying motivations which in everyday life drive human beings to dominate one another are here translated into actuality by peeling off the defensive layers of shame and hypocrisy which obscure them. Sofia ministers to them as though she were the embodiment of a beneficent natural force. As a result, one can be no more judgmental of their behavior toward the maid than of wolves pursuing the stragglers in a herd of caribou.

Drama is created out of waiting and out of silence along with the unexpected revelation of human nature. By stripping his characters of the rituals and masks of civilized behavior, Panayotopoulos demystifies; he lays bare the urges and needs which have provided the impetus for the creation of civilization. If we laugh it is perhaps because we see ourselves not as we would like to be, but as the preposterous poseurs we often are.

We laugh, for example, at the beginning of the film when the sons permit Sofia to carry their large, heavy valises up two flights of stairs. We expect at least one of the men to show at least a little gallantry—even with the ulterior purpose of seducing her—but they do nothing. Later, at the meeting of the family council, the scene is repeated except, this time, Sofia carries Yannis up the stairs on her back. Gallantry permits man to win the favor of or to dominate and exploit woman. Panayotopoulos's characters have everything they want so they just act naturally, i.e., selfishly.

In his first film Panayotopoulos demonstrates his knowledge of cinema, but *Idlers* is most heavily indebted to the theater, to Beckett in particular. Once we adjust to the metamorphosis of Beckett's world, the playwright's influence becomes evident everywhere. Both Panayotopoulos and Beckett strip their characters of all pretensions of civilization and permit them to express, albeit feebly, only their essential needs: nourishment, excretion, and copulation. There are long periods of inactivity, no progression of events or development of character. In *Idlers* the wait for something to happen, for something to change, is as frustrating as the wait for Godot; yet, imperceptibly, a statement is made about humanity and the nature of time and reality. Beckett has been described as a poet of silence, because his characters, despite their outbursts of garrulousness, manage only to express their inability to communicate, the failure of language and reason and the disintegration of their environment and their physical selves. Because the film permits us to watch the men as they atrophy, it makes dialogue almost superfluous.

Even in the matter of minor details there are correspondences. Vladimir *(Waiting for Godot)* and the father both have hernias. The exploitation of Sofia by the men as though she were a beast of burden recalls Pozzo's treatment of Lucky. In *Endgame,* Hamm's treatment of Clov is equally harsh. And *Idlers* can be considered an endgame situation. There is even Beckett's own personal preference (shared with his philosophical foil,

Descartes) for staying in bed each day until noon. I could continue pointing out similarities, but it should be enough to say that Panayotopoulos sheds light on Beckett's drab grey world without clarifying the ambiguities that have proved the delight of critics everywhere.

Unlike *La Grande bouffe*, to which *Idlers* has been compared, there is neither nihilism nor suicidal death wish here, but rather a festive obliteration of death. *Idlers* can be more appropriately compared to *2001*, which begins at the dawn of human consciousness and ends in the womb. As the father becomes totally bedridden, he re-enacts his infancy by nursing at Sofia's breast. (Dream images of an unborn child in the womb which would have explicitly stated the evolutionary movement of the men were cut by Panayotopoulos.) We are permitted to see in the sleeping figures of the men the longings of the unconscious mind—along with the images of the sleeping men comes the sense of timelessness and of complete release. Without diminishing the image of man by setting it against the monumental vastness of the universe, as does Kubrick, Panayotopoulos places man in eternity, his brief flirtation with the conscious mind and reason having been put aside.

—E. D. KARAMPETSOS

Books

AMERICAN FILM NOW
The People, the Power, the Money, the Movies

By James Monaco. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979. $19.95.

James Monaco has once again put us in his debt.* *American Film Now*, his latest offering, should be read by anyone who is concerned with or by the shape of the American film industry. Not the least of the reasons why this book ought to be widely read is that the problems afflicting the industry—and, more to the point, injuring us, the "consumers" of its "product"—may be rather more difficult to resolve than Monaco seems to think. While he is an alert diagnostician of some of the film industry's ills, and while he provides a wealth of information about what ails it, and affects us, his diagnosis leads to a prescription (or is it a prognosis?) that is finally rather too cautious. Monaco's downbeat conclusion about the ills whose symptoms he identifies so well—a conclusion that amounts to saying that somewhere, somehow, there is a ray or two of hope—has to it an air of complacency which seems out of tune with the diagnosis itself. Monaco's seeming unwillingness to bite the hand that by now feeds him (reports have it that he now reads and vets screenplays) implies rather more than mere anticlimax; and, if this judgment sounds harsh and *ad hominem*, I can only add to it an injunction—that anyone who believes (as I do) that drastic problems require drastic solutions should read Monaco all the same, even though when it comes down to the line he seems to think differently. Monaco's book is indispensable, not just because of the mass of information it provides (as a reference book alone it would be invaluable) but also because *American Film Now*, for all its undogmatic tone, raises urgent and pressing issues that have to be met, one way or another.

But this is not all it does. *American Film Now* could be seen as two or three books in one, or as working on two or three different fronts. Of 540 pages, some 220 (Chapters 1-3, and 11) are devoted to the business of making movies, to what goes in and doesn't go in; 300 (Chapters 4-10) deal with the product of these increasingly coordinated endeavors, with what comes out and doesn't come out; and a full 140 pages provide data—filmographies, critical choices, a bibliography, and (most useful of all) a checklist of writers, producers, cinematographers, composers, designers, sound and special-effects people, as well as directors, actors, and actresses. The tra-

*His other writings include *The New Wave: How to Read a Film: Celebrity: The Media as Image-makers: Media Culture:* and *Alain Resnais.*

Descartes) for staying in bed each day until noon. I could continue pointing out similarities, but it should be enough to say that Panayotopoulos sheds light on Beckett's drab grey world without clarifying the ambiguities that have proved the delight of critics everywhere.

Unlike *La Grande bouffe*, to which *Idlers* has been compared, there is neither nihilism nor suicidal death wish here, but rather a festive obliteration of death. *Idlers* can be more appropriately compared to *2001*, which begins at the dawn of human consciousness and ends in the womb. As the father becomes totally bedridden, he re-enacts his infancy by nursing at Sofia's breast. (Dream images of an unborn child in the womb which would have explicitly stated the evolutionary movement of the men were cut by Panayotopoulos.) We are permitted to see in the sleeping figures of the men the longings of the unconscious mind—along with the images of the sleeping men comes the sense of timelessness and of complete release. Without diminishing the image of man by setting it against the monumental vastness of the universe, as does Kubrick, Panayotopoulos places man in eternity, his brief flirtation with the conscious mind and reason having been put aside.

—E. D. KARAMPETSOS

Books

AMERICAN FILM NOW
The People, the Power, the Money, the Movies

By James Monaco. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979. $19.95.

James Monaco has once again put us in his debt.* *American Film Now*, his latest offering, should be read by anyone who is concerned with or by the shape of the American film industry. Not the least of the reasons why this book ought to be widely read is that the problems afflicting the industry—and, more to the point, injuring us, the "consumers" of its "product"—may be rather more difficult to resolve than Monaco seems to think. While he is an alert diagnostician of some of the film industry's ills, and while he provides a wealth of information about what ails it, and affects us, his diagnosis leads to a prescription (or is it a prognosis?) that is finally rather too cautious. Monaco's downbeat conclusion about the ills whose symptoms he identifies so well—a conclusion that amounts to saying that somewhere, somehow, there is a ray or two of hope—has to it an air of complacency which seems out of tune with the diagnosis itself. Monaco's seeming unwillingness to bite the hand that by now feeds him (reports have it that he now reads and vets screenplays) implies rather more than mere anticlimax; and, if this judgment sounds harsh and *ad hominem*, I can only add to it an injunction—that anyone who believes (as I do) that drastic problems require drastic solutions should read Monaco all the same, even though when it comes down to the line he seems to think differently. Monaco's book is indispensable, not just because of the mass of information it provides (as a reference book alone it would be invaluable) but also because *American Film Now*, for all its undogmatic tone, raises urgent and pressing issues that have to be met, one way or another.

But this is not all it does. *American Film Now* could be seen as two or three books in one, or as working on two or three different fronts. Of 540 pages, some 220 (Chapters 1-3, and 11) are devoted to the business of making movies, to what goes in and doesn't go in; 300 (Chapters 4-10) deal with the product of these increasingly coordinated endeavors, with what comes out and doesn't come out; and a full 140 pages provide data—filmographies, critical choices, a bibliography, and (most useful of all) a checklist of writers, producers, cinematographers, composers, designers, sound and special-effects people, as well as directors, actors, and actresses. The tra-

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jectory Monaco follows is a kind of elliptical orbit starting from a consideration of the business of making films, moving through a series of brief critical appraisals, under various headings, of the films themselves, and then back to the industry again. The range is comprehensive, even encyclopedic, but *American Film Now* manages to be utterly absorbing without ever being ponderous; Monaco writes attractively, if a trifle racily at times, and has come up with a hard book to put down.

Its middle (rather than central) section, the seven chapters dealing with "output," deal respectively with "The People Who Make Movies" (actors, actresses, screenwriters, cinematographers, producers, editors, composers, designers); with "The Whiz Kids" of the seventies (Bogdanovich, Friedkin, Scorsese, De Palma, Lucas, Spielberg, Schrader); with "The Black Film"; with Comics and Comedians; with "Myth, Realism and Other Ways of Meaning"; with Cassavetes, Altman and Coppola; and with Ritchie and Mazursky. Since I take this section as the middle section, and not as the centerpiece, of *American Film Now*, and since Oxford Press, with their slightly misleading "Monaco-hits-Hollywood" publicity, evidently want most readers' attention to be concentrated on the "business" side of the book, I shall not dwell on Chapters 4-10 beyond observing that the career rundowns are very ably done (even if you can almost hear the index cards flopping and fluttering) and that Monaco's critical comments on films, made almost always in passing, are deft and to the point. A few examples will have to suffice. Monaco is very good on Victor Kemper's extraordinary *plan-séquence* (a curving backwards tracking shot combined with a slow coordinated zoom inwards so that the size of Alice in the frame doesn't change, though our perception of depth in the image frame does change), which brings to a close Arthur Penn's *Alice's Restaurant*. He's also right that Penn's *Mickey One* is "the most pretentious film by a major American director in the last thirty years." Monaco has a lot of fun with *Interiors* (all of it to my mind entirely justified), and in general has a way of making telling, and sometimes arresting, judgments—for example that "the real success of *Nashville* lies in its multiple interstices," or that (in a comparison of *Bound for Glory* and *Days of Heaven*) "if Ashby *induces* myth, Terrence Malick *deduces* it."

Yet what is likely to be important and controversial about *American Film Now* is not so much Monaco's pointed judgments about films and the people most immediately engaged in making them, but the overview he provides. Since all his instances and examples point back to an industry in crisis, let's look at the dimensions of the state of emergency. At the most basic level, tendencies towards monopolization and centralization, towards power without responsibility, have long dominated all communications industries in the United States. In Monaco's words, "Six film companies effectively control American movies. Three companies (the networks) exert an even more forceful monopoly over television. Two of these companies (CBS and RCA), together with the film companies (Warner Communications, Inc., in particular) thoroughly dominate the recording industry. Newspaper chains are acquiring properties at an unprecedented rate. Even the book-publishing industry . . . has been subject in recent years to more than three hundred mergers and acquisitions." And if this alarms you—as it should—consider that the receipts *either* of Exxon *or* Shell Oil, in 1977 (*before* profits soared) exceeded the level of *all* media industries combined. This point is not irrelevant, since the fact that media conglomerates are "small fry in the corporate world" may be the single most important fact about what is happening in the film industry. In Monaco's words, "reading the corporate annual reports of the film companies and their conglomerate owners, you get the feeling that if theatrical film disappeared within the next few years all of them would survive rather nicely." Warner Communications, Inc., made twice as much money in 1977 from records and music publishing as it did from movies; and the grand total of 6 percent of the revenues of Gulf and Western the same year came from Paramount Pictures. The statistics are not uniform (for instance, 73 percent of Twentieth Century-Fox's revenues in 1977 came from film and TV, although how this breaks down we are not told); but nevertheless Monaco seems quite justified in saying that today "the film business looks . . . like a conglomerateur's hobby." The fate of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, "once the largest, most profitable and most prestigious of Hollywood studios," is instructive: "The company was effectively liq-

uidated in the late 'sixties by . . . Kirk Kerkorian [a Las Vegas real-estate magnate who had bought it] who preferred to shift M-G-M capital from the movie business to the resort-hotel business." (*Ars gratia artis*, indeed!) As to the studios that remain, United Artists is typical enough: "Even in a year when it broke industry records [with *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Rocky*, and *Annie Hall*] UA contributed only 10-11 percent of Transamerica Corporation revenues as a whole."

All these examples point to the same conclusion: that "the [film] medium itself and the information it conveys are seen only as a means toward the end of stable, ever-growing profits." It may seem on the face of it that there is nothing particularly new in all this, since "film in America has always been better understood as industry rather than as art." But this general truth can have the effect of obscuring the crucial changes that have taken place. As Monaco (here following the sociologist Thorstein Veblen) sees it, with the growth of conglomerate ownership and control, and with the breakdown of the Hollywood studio system, film is now better understood not as an industry but as a business; while Veblen's "industrialists" were concerned with their products as well as the profits to be derived from them, his "businessmen" were concerned with the product only as a marginal feature of the profit it brings. "The industrialist," as Monaco puts it, "is concerned with profit rather than loss; the businessman is more interested in profit as opposed to higher profit."

While Monaco's use of Veblen's distinction does make a certain amount of sense, I'm not sure that it indicates what he wants it to indicate—that is, the lack of concern of the "businessman" for the "product" itself. Such lack of concern was palpable in the case of Kerkorian, to be sure; but the conglomerateurs who still make and distribute films, like other hobbyists, show not lack of concern *tout court*, but lack of the kind of concern that can be justified to anyone else. Yet their concern, their hobbies, are paid for by others, and their concern with what we see on the screen is largely evident in the "blockbuster" strategy all of them have adopted. Basically, there is more money of a certain kind now to be made from fewer movies. In 1972, the ten most profitable films at the box-office grossed $123 million; in 1977, the ten most profitable films grossed $424 million. The same year, *Star Wars* alone earned $4 million more than the *entire list* of the ten highest grossing films in 1972. Monaco has some very pointed things to say about all this. "Throughout the 'seventies the six major distributors have, each year, reduced the number of films made and distributed . . . The share of the total film audience each year represented by the ten highest grossing films is increasing three times faster than the size of the total audience. In other words, increasingly we are all going to see the same ten movies." The shift is not accidental but has been very carefully calculated. "The businessmen of the new Hollywood have, in a sense, 'desaturated' the film market, and the result has been higher profits all round and safer gambles on each individual film made. This is very good for business, not so good for filmmakers and filmgoers."

But surely—it might be objected—the investment of vast amounts of money in projects whose success cannot be foreseen signifies a willingness to take chances, an enterprise and initiative that made this country great? And furthermore—it might be objected—hasn't the strategy paid off, not simply in the sense that the conglomerates are "giving the people what they want," but also in the sense that the long-term downward trend in the popularity of movies, which can be dated from the impact of TV in the early fifties, began to be reversed in the 1975-77 period? Monaco's answer to all these questions is: not at all. "Blockbusters," he points out, "are essentially a conservative and cautious strategy. It may seem like a tremendous gamble to invest $20 or $30 million in a film, but in fact very few blockbusters actually lose money." Even the De Laurentiis *King Kong*, which met with a lukewarm public response, made a small profit simply because the distribution company was able to twist enough exhibitors' arms in advance of showing (or even seeing) the film to extract guarantees that would cover its basic costs. "The distributors came out relatively unscathed; it was the exhibitors who had to absorb the losses." And while this kind of displacement is not without precedent in film history, the amount of muscle distributors now have is ex-

treme; they are quite capable of extorting crippling terms (e.g., 90 percent of box-office net) from exhibitors—whose popcorn profits are, however, all their own. Hence the paradox: even a highly successful blockbuster is likely to be less profitable *relatively* speaking than a small-budget film (e.g., *Rocky* or *Cuckoo's Nest*) that packs 'em in. *Star Wars* returned $10 for every dollar invested; *American Graffiti* returned $150. Other things being equal, the exhibitors would prefer to screen a successful non-blockbuster to a successful blockbuster, since the distributor's rake-off is not nearly so onerous. But of course other things are anything but equal; these days it is not the exhibitor, nor yet the consumer, who calls the shots, but the big six distribution companies. "The conglomerate film world is not as interested in making a lot of money as in breaking even, or earning a small profit to keep the sales curve stable. The blockbuster strategy doesn't make you rich; it simply means more cash flow."

The results of this self-sustaining process are latent as well as manifest, since in an increasingly finite world of film production everything we see at our neighborhood theater is increasingly likely to exclude something else that would have been more worthy; but of course, as Monaco points out, "we have no way of knowing what films have been sacrificed to a stable profit-curve." Conversely, it's hard not to agree with Monaco that to increase the number of films produced by the American film industry, and to decrease the average budget correspondingly, would benefit not only film-makers and moviegoers but would also strengthen the profitability of the industry. One need add only that this is the very route that is least likely to be taken under present-day conditions.

Given the fact that the "safest" areas of the film production process today are investment and distribution, is it possible that to the extent that the big six concentrate on these areas an opening is created for independent producers? Yes and no. It would appear that "by artificially reducing the number of films available to the public . . . [the six majors] may have paved the way for independent challengers"—challengers like Orion (which is however dependent on its distribution tie-in with Warners) or like Robert Stigwood (with *Saturday Night Fever* and *Grease*). But while "as it stands now, independent producers have the potential to compete with studio productions . . . they cannot realize this potential as long as the distribution arms of the conglomerates continue to [police] the crucial channels to the public." Not to put too fine a point on it, the six majors are censoring what we see. And besides, the ground on which independents must stand is increasingly being eroded. The studio system, which meant that writers, directors, actors, actresses and technicians were kept under long-term contract, and that there was a high studio overhead to meet each week, is gone, and gone for good. Correspondingly, production "executives today, with very few exceptions, act as arbiters, traffic-cops. They do not have the creative power of their predecessors, the moguls of the old Hollywood." If "the economic focus of Hollywood has shifted from its old center, production, to its new, distribution and finance," it is striking that producers in general have not achieved "greater clout" as a result. As Monaco pointedly puts it, "can anyone really tell the difference between an Alan Ladd, Jr., project and a film approved and financed by Dan Melnick?" Today it is whiz-kid directors, heirs-apparent of a watered-down *auteur* theory (Friedkin, Scorsese, Lucas, Coppola, Spielberg), and no longer the moguls (Thalberg, Zanuck, Selznick, Goldwyn, Cohn) who compete with the overpriced stars for the public's attention. One only has to pose the question "what do the names of Donald Simpson, Paula Weinstein, Mark Rosenberg, Thom Mount, Claire Townsend *mean* to the average filmgoer?" to recognize that today's production executive is exactly as pallid and faceless as the structure of the industry would lead us to expect.

Finally, Monaco provides plenty of disturbing evidence to support his claim that the conglomerate economic structure of the new Hollywood means that "the [film] medium itself and the information it conveys are seen only as a means toward the end of stable, ever-growing profits" by those in a position of power, and that to these same people the windfall profits it's still possible to derive from a small-budget, independently produced film are more of a distraction than anything else. And Monaco is right in his con-

tention that "the financial health of the film industry in the late 'seventies has been bought at the expense of movies themselves." The conglomerate economic structure "literally defines the limits of possibility in the industry. It is not illegal. It is not immoral. Most important, it is not dramatic. As a result, it doesn't get much coverage. But it affects our lives profoundly. And the so-called New Hollywood, despite numerous cosmetic changes, will not undergo a real and lasting Renaissance until that conglomerate structure is radically altered or outlawed entirely." Yet the only reason Monaco advances for denying the immorality of all this is that, in his own words, "there is nothing wrong with having only six distribution companies (which is after all twice the number of television companies) as long as we all have equal and free access to their facilities." Here Monaco is failing to face up to the implications of the evidence he himself has adduced. For in fact it *is* wrong, it *is* immoral, and, as to TV, two wrongs do not make a right. Monaco may fondly believe that "free and equal access" (access *to what*?) is possible; I can think of nothing less likely, particularly after reading Monaco's description of what is in the end a self-sustaining process of monopolization. Monaco recommends that cross-ownership between business and the media be outlawed or restricted, which strikes me as a singularly unlikely prospect; and he urges that the companies that control "our" channels of communication be forced to answer for the "public trust" they bear. Just what this might mean Monaco leaves unclear; and, while he insists by way of conclusion that "it is time to recognize the studios as common carriers," he has already provided a great deal of evidence that this "time" has already passed, and that the opportunity to do something has been lost. Mel Brooks's "Engulf and Devour" shows every sign of being around for some time to come. —PAUL THOMAS

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A CRITIQUE OF FILM THEORY

By Brian Henderson. New York: Dutton, 1980. Cloth, $15.95; paper, $8.95.

To his penetrating articles which appeared in this journal and in *Film Comment*, Henderson has added a substantial, systematic Preface and a new, long essay pursuing the evolution of Christian Metz's thought. The result—at least in my hardly disinterested opinion—is one of the most significant of recent books on film. Henderson's purpose is philosophical in the best sense: to isolate and critique the fundamental logical structure of existing film theory (which remains stubbornly either Bazinian or Eisensteinian, and in both cases is largely a theory of the shot) with the implicit aim, of course, of clearing the ground for new advances. But his writing, while it possesses the difficulty normally associated with ambitious levels of rigor, is also passionately concerned with particular films and film-makers (Godard, above all). Essential reading for anyone wishing to understand past film theory, or hoping to contribute to the new theory we now should be ready for. —E.C.

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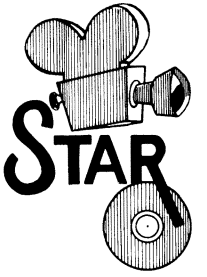

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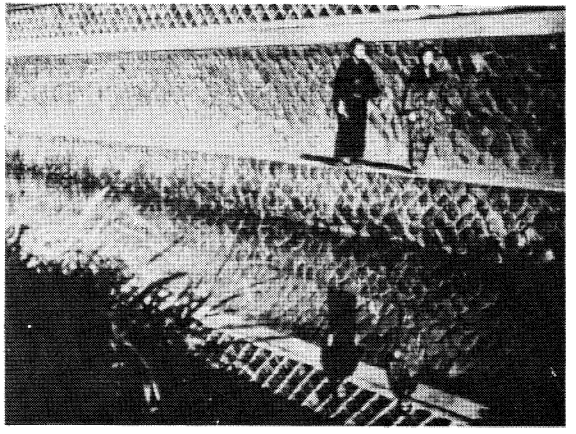

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